PRIVATE EYE

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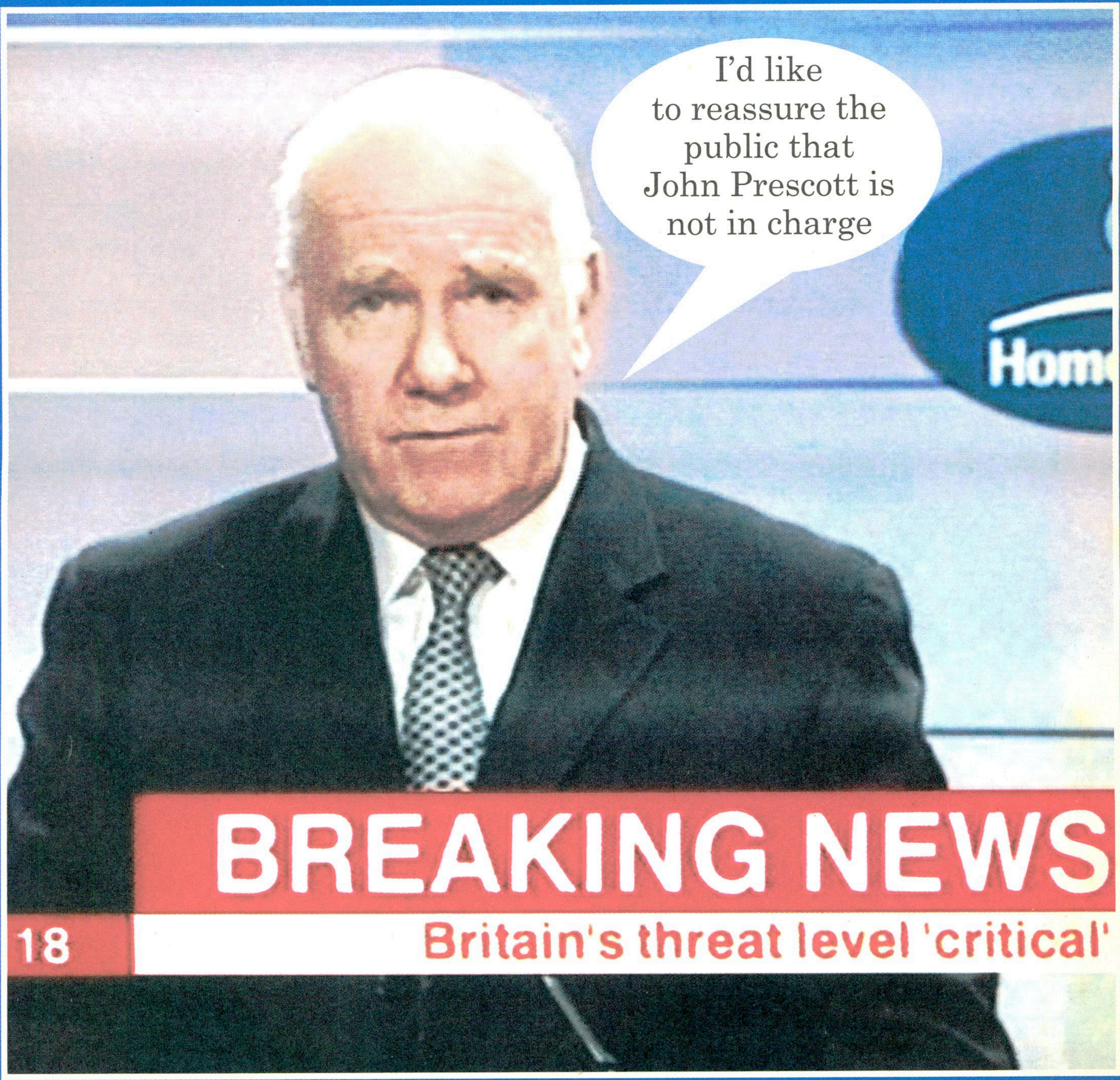

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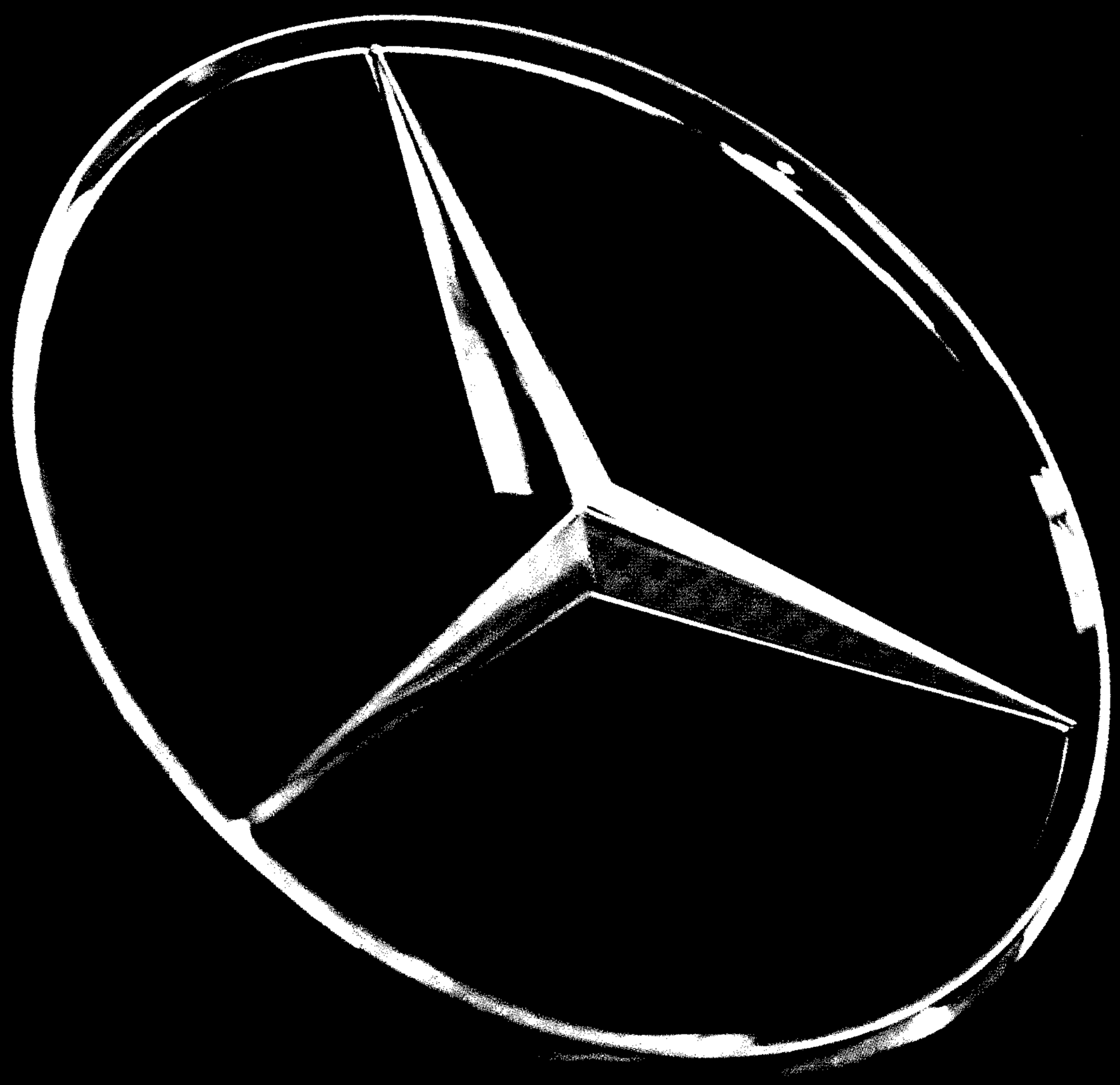
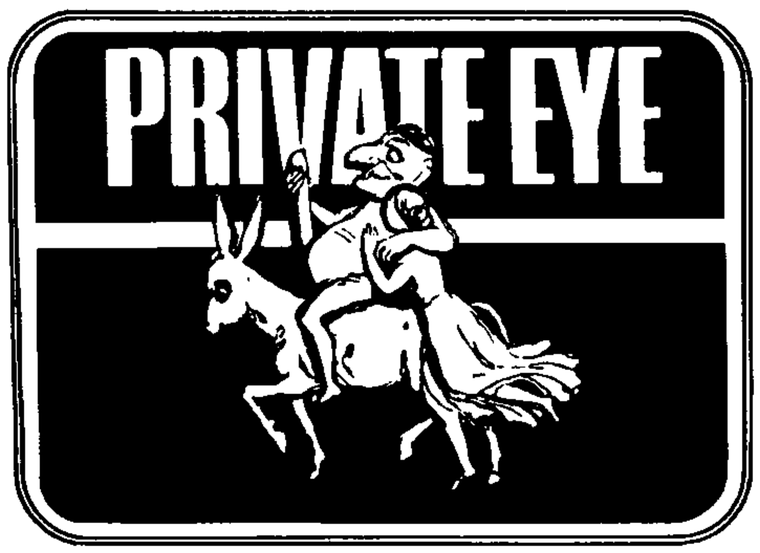


OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES (MPG/LITRES PER 100KM) FOR THE MERCEDES-BENZ PASSENGER CAR RANGE: URBAN 45.6-12.1/6.2-23.4, EXTRA URBAN 65.7-27.2/4.3-10.4, COMBINED 57.6-18.7/4.9-15.1. CO2 EMISSIONS 128-362 G/KM.



Bags of transparency

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LET it not be said that John Prescott has been left with nothing to do in the wake of last week's terrorism arrests.

On Friday 11th, with the front pages dominated by Home Secretary John Reid's warnings of "loss of life on an unprecedented scale", the Deputy Prime Minister had a letter published on the *Daily Express*'s letters page.

"I am pleased that you share my concerns about potentially dangerous temperature levels over the summer," he wrote. "I want to be assured that all the correct procedures are in place to protect the most vulnerable in our society – such as the very young, the elderly and infirm – should we encounter a further heatwave, and I am meeting relevant charities to listen to concerns they may have."

With him in charge, we're all safe!

TONY BLAIR finally flew out to Barbados last Tuesday, having delayed his holiday by four days because, in the words of his official spokesman, "he will be continuing his intensive diplomacy with world leaders from Downing Street, trying to achieve a UN resolution" on the Lebanon crisis.

Curiously, he seemed to fit in a lot of other work too. On Monday 7 August, when he had been scheduled to be attending a sun lounger by Sir Cliff's pool, the prime minister managed to launch a new environmental initiative to give subsidised carbon audits to homeowners ("A lot of it's about information to people, because I think people kind of do want to do the right thing, but they kind of look at climate change and think: 'This is so enormous and it's global, how the hell can I do anything about it?'"), address the National Black Police Association in Manchester and urge the Senior Salaries Review Board not to grant too large a pay rise to MPs.

He did so in the form of a taped interview with Radio One, a video message and a letter released to the Commons. Not content with gagging John Prescott and locking him in his office, Blair appears to have tried, Ferris Bueller-like, to leave enough pre-recorded material behind to convince people he hadn't gone anywhere. And if it wasn't for those pesky terror arrests two days after he skipped the country, he might even have got away with it…

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 0870 750 1714 or 01795 414 871
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ABC

EYE TOLD YOU SO

PERHAPS bosses at the government's health IT agency Connecting for Health should have read the Eye before lending taxpayers' money to iSoft, the main software supplier on the £12.4bn NHS IT programme, to keep it afloat.

The cash advance in April last year – four months after the *Eye* (1121) raised serious concerns over the company's accounts – is looking distinctly questionable as a formal investigation is launched into the company's accounts and the only director who was there a year ago and who hasn't resigned has been suspended.

Meanwhile iSoft's share price has fallen through the floor and some are questioning its future on the programme.

CfH won't tell the *Eye* how much iSoft was advanced, nor how much was lent to the other big suppliers on the floundering programme. Only Accenture has admitted to financial trouble, although all are years behind schedule and are supposedly paid only on results.

On the most important part of the programme, installing record systems in hospitals, the worst laggard is BT. Up to this April the firm had been paid just £1.3m against an outlay in the hundreds of millions – yet recorded no loss as it treated its expenditure as "work in progress". As predicted, BT has now ditched the software supplier it was using, IDX, posing more questions over whether the work really is worth what is claimed for it.

Meanwhile the monumental delays may have gone some way to sparing the blushes of US firm CSC, responsible for the programme across the north west and West Midlands. Two weeks ago its data storage centre collapsed, bringing down the administration systems it had installed in 80 trusts and in the process demonstrating one of the scheme's central flaws: the risks posed by the over-centralisation imposed by CfH.

It was only because CSC had not installed the clinical record systems it should have that patients' medical details didn't vanish into the ether as well. CSC is also under investigation in the US for suspect accounting, in its case back-dating directors' share options to siphon off more cash. Is the nation's health information in safe hands?

● *See Slicker, p. 28*

AS "mission creep" continues to extend the role of British service personnel around the world, at least their pay is in safe hands back home. Or not.

EDS's Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system was supposed to take over the payrolls for all three of the armed forces earlier this year but has so far only been introduced for the RAF – with disastrous consequences.

Eye 1158 reported the many problems being experienced by, among others, pilots who weren't receiving "flying pay" and ground crew who were. A stream of complaints and pleas for help duly appeared on a pilots' website, prompting the MoD's Wing Commander Trevor Field to publicly lambast "bored" "whingers". "It adds fuel to a fire that is now smouldering," he complained, "and by the end of the week will be solved completely," he said.

That was in early May. Three months on and with the system showing no improvement, another MoD boss has been forced to write again in slightly different terms. "I fully recognise that the introduction of JPA to the RAF has had many more problems than were envisaged," he admits. "The fact remains that it is an immature product and much work remains to be done."

Among the problems conceded are inadequate training for the people running the system and poor "system functionality". The result is incorrect pay and 5,000 outstanding complaints.

Meanwhile the project has already overrun its originally estimated £112m budget, with costs set to spiral further when the army and navy are brought in next year. There's no sign of any comeback on EDS, however, whose relationship with the MoD flourishes through the £4bn Defence Information Infrastructure contract handed to the firm last year – not to mention the former MoD top brass now luxuriating in the EDS boardroom.

Number crunching

£40m ■ Cuts ordered by Army's Land Command over next eight months

£4bn ■ Defence contract given to EDS

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

July 2006: Tony Blair makes speech on "public health", pointing out that 10 percent of NHS resources are consumed by diabetes, which is linked to "avoidable" obesity. "The reason we need a new and more robust approach to health is precisely because of the facts I've just listed."

August 2006: Department of Health cuts all funding for research into the link between diabetes and childhood obesity.

"This is ludicrous"

Street of Shame

WHEN Tory leader David Cameron made his infamous hug-a-hoodie speech, urging his party to be more understanding of young gangs of teenagers wearing hooded tops, the *Torygraph* savaged him for the woolly liberal sentiment behind his words. What critics such as Simon Heffer and Janet Daley might not have known was that the speech was partly penned by their very own chief leader writer, Danny Kruger.

Kruger has always been openly affiliated to the Conservative party. After all, he's the man who stood as a parliamentary candidate for the Conservatives before the then leader Michael Howard ditched him for speaking out in favour of the "creative destruction" of bureaucracy in the public services.

But most at the *Telegraph* weren't aware that Kruger still maintained such close links with the party, let alone helped write its leader's speeches.

Kruger, another in a long line of Bertie Wooster-esque signings on the *Torygraph*'s comment desk, is well connected – his mother is Prue Leith and his cousin is another *Telegraph* writer, Sam Leith. But that hasn't stopped him feeling that his position among the trenchantly anti-Cameron *Telegraph* team is now untenable. So he's leaving… to become a special adviser to David Cameron.

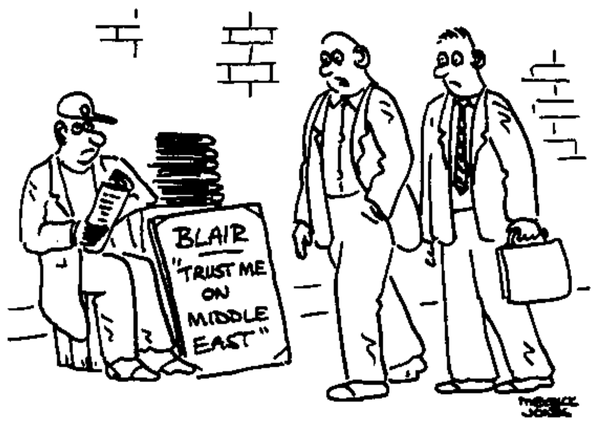
OLD Fleet Street habits die hard – even at the allegedly enlightened *Independent on Sunday*, where Andy Malone, the thuggish drunken executive news editor who once outraged wimmin at *The Observer* by complaining that the "beaver count" wasn't high enough in the newsroom (*Eye* 970), is at the centre of a management investigation into allegations of a "culture of bullying".

Malone was the intended recipient of a highly derogatory email about a young newsdesk secretary from his pal Peter Victor, the acting news editor. Alas Victor hasn't got the hang of email yet and sent his message by mistake to the young woman in question, Sara Newman.

On reading her boss's low opinion of her work and personality, sent for a laugh to his mate Malone, Newman – whose first "proper" job this was – burst into tears and fled the office. After NUJ reps became involved she filed a complaint against Victor and has been redeployed at the daily *Independent*.

New managing editor Imogen Haddon is now conducting confidential interviews with staff to assess the extent of bullying at the *Sindie* with its macho newsdesk culture. Father-of-three Victor is famous for leering at the legs and bums of numerous work experience hackettes, while Malone loudly accuses male hacks who displease him of being "poofs" and "shirtlifters".

Perhaps both men should be forced to read their own paper – the 6 August edition of which carried a news report and opinion piece on the evils of bullying in the workplace.



"That's a good start to the silly season"

BY ROYAL APPOINTMENT

THE *News of the World*'s Royal Editor, Clive Goodman, was charged last week in with the illegal interception of phone calls made by members of the royal family. Here are some of the stories Goodman has published over the last year – all, naturally, acquired through his excellent contacts in the royal household and good old-fashioned journalism.

4 December: "Prince Harry is in secret talks with Comic Relief for a joint project to help HIV victims in an impoverished African state. The 21-year-old prince has made the Mants'ase care home for orphans in Lesotho his pet cause since a gap-year stint there before joining Sandhurst military academy."

18 December: "Christmas comes as a welcome rest for Prince Harry's private secretary, Jamie Lowther-Pinkerton. Because on top of normal duties, JLP has been giving Harry a guiding hand through his Sandhurst studies… 'It's like Who Wants To Be a Brigadier with Jamie as Harry's phone-a-friend lifeline," joked one colleague."

15 January: "As Prince William pines for girlfriend Kate Middleton, he's doing his best to make his Sandhurst quarters more homely… 'Everything is khaki this and khaki that. It's all completely army,' he confided to a pal."

12 February: "We reveal how Wills is grooming his Valentine to be a royal… and their secret nicknames… The pair have been secretly phoning and texting each other every day and even arranged to meet – strictly against Sandhurst rules. A pal said: 'Willie would hide his phone in his kit and send her a cheeky text so she knew she wasn't on her own'… He has a picture of her in his room. 'I don't know if it's allowed,' Wills joked to a cadet. 'I might get b*******d for breaking rules or congratulated on my taste'."

26 February: "Unlike younger brother Harry, Prince William doesn't go in for boozy bonding binges with his platoon. Harry's friends are used to fielding drunken calls in the early hours as he screams good natured abuse at them."

19 March: "Chelsy Davy and Prince Harry are slipping off for a hideaway holiday in an attempt to patch up their rocky romance. The couple haven't seen each other since welcoming the new year together and Chelsy's only communication with the prince has been when he makes his late night drunken calls from nightclubs. 'The phone will go at 3am or 4am and it's him swearing how much he loves her,' said a family friend. 'It would be more convincing if there weren't music, clinking glasses and girl's voices in the background'."

9 April: "Shame-faced Prince Harry has been given a furious dressing-down over his late-night antics in a lapdancing bar. Yesterday the repentant Prince took an ear-bashing phone call as news broke. 'It's Chelsy. How could you? I see you had a lovely time without me. But I miss you so much, you big ginger, and I want you to know that I love you,' said a hysterical voice. Luckily the caller was joker brother Prince William. He thought the whole episode was hilarious and decided to take the mickey by putting on a high-pitched South African accent."

16 April: "Boozy Prince William and his gang of braying pals outraged guests at Prince Harry's passing-out ball with disgraceful drunken antics. Just hours afterwards Sandhurst's commandant General Andrew Ritchie rang William's office at Clarence House to register the complaints and ask for an explanation. The prince's private secretary Jamie Lowther-Pinkerton is now trying to smooth over the row."

16 July: "A laptop containing 'highly sensitive' royal files has been stolen from Buckingham Palace," reveals Goodman in yet another royal exclusive. "Police are taking the theft very seriously. An aide added: 'They won't stop looking until they find out who's got this laptop'."

Three weeks later, police are reported to be searching the offices of the *News of the World* in Wapping while Goodman is interrogated in Charing Cross Police Station. Wouldn't you like to be a fly on the wall for that conversation?

THE news that rock singer and self-appointed scourge of world poverty Bono had moved his band U2's publishing company to the Netherlands to avoid tax in his native Ireland prompted questions at the *Sunday Times* about what happened to an investigation by Jonathan Calvert, the paper's Insight editor, into the financial arrangements of Bono's compatriot, Bob Geldof, last summer.

Commissioned in the run-up to last summer's Live 8 concerts and based on weeks of painstaking research, the piece was suddenly spiked on the eve of publication following a phone call to editor John Witherow from Geldof's friend Matthew Freud (who by an astonishing coincidence also happens to be *Sunday Times* proprietor Rupert Murdoch's son-in-law).

Witherow's explanation to disappointed staff? A terse: "I'm not publishing this fucking story."

FORMER *Times* writer Andrew Pierce's appointment as assistant editor at the *Telegraph* was received with gloom by the broadsheet's hacks. They noted that the paper now has more assistant editors and associate editors than staff news reporters.

Pierce was heralded as a fine acquisition by the Telegraph Group's editor-in-chief John Bryant; but insiders detect the hand of Guy Black in the appointment. The *Telegraph*'s PR supremo and former director of the Press Complaints Commission is a close contact of Pierce. Indeed, Black has been spotted showing Pierce and PCC chairman Sir Christopher Meyer around the paper's new offices in Victoria – a sight the gloomy hacks have not yet been invited to see for themselves.

***SUNDAY TIMES* hackette Shane Watson devoted her column on 30 July to the way romantic holidays rarely live up to expectations, the biggest let-down for a woman on a "love holiday", concluded Watson, usually being her male companion.**

"Women can do meaningful hand-touching across the sun loungers; men's hands are already full with a giant hardback and a Coke," she wrote before cataloguing the interest the tedious male then shows in Sky+ and the "large book that he has been dying to read for a couple of years (probably *Stalingrad*)" and which he even reads at table before lunch is served.

"By week two, the BlackBerry, which was supposed to be used strictly on arrival and re-entry, has turned up on the breakfast table. The spa treatments, comedy-luxurious in the first couple of days, are now (his expression says) ludicrously expensive. Ditto the cocktails. He is very hot, all the time, and increasingly restless…"

The fruit of bitter experience for Watson? Surely not. Her column was the first she wrote after returning from a blissful honeymoon in Italy with Tristan Davies, editor of the *Independent on Sunday*!

9.30 Traffic Cops. South Yorkshire's traffic police continue to chase teenagers in stolen cars. *Independent*

Much has been made of the government's decision to invest heavily in pubic services over recent years. *Whitehall & Westminster World*

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

FOLLOWING the criminal charges of intercepting phone messages laid against Clive Goodman, the royal editor of the *News of the World*, and another man, and the announcement that the police are "widening their investigation", how many other journalists are clogging the shredder this week while nervously awaiting a finger on their collars?

A clue is provided by a report presented to parliament in May this year by the Information Commissioner's Office entitled "What Price Privacy?" It called for a strengthening of the law concerning what it termed "a pervasive and widespread industry devoted to illegally buying and selling people's personal information".

"Among the buyers are many journalists looking for a story," the report noted. "In one major case investigated by the ICO, the evidence included records of information supplied to 305 named journalists working for a range of newspapers... Primary documentation seized at the premises of a Hampshire private detective consisted largely of correspondence (reports, invoices, settlement of bills etc) between the detective and many of the better-known national newspapers – tabloid and broadsheet – and magazines.

"In almost every case, the individual journalist seeking the information was named, and invoices and payment slips identified leading media groups. Some of these even referred explicity to 'confidential information'.

"The information which the detective supplied to the newspapers included details of criminal records, registered keepers of vehicles, driving licence details, ex-directory telephone numbers, itemised telephone billing and mobile phone records, and details of 'Friends & Family' telephone numbers...

"At a time when senior members of the press were publicly congratulating themselves for having raised journalistic standards across the industry, many newspapers were continuing to subscribe to an undercover economy devoted to obtaining a wealth of personal information forbidden to them by law. One remarkable fact is how well documented this underworld turned out to be."

The list of alleged victims interviewed by the commissioner also made interesting reading – "a number of celebrities and others in the public eye such as professional footballers and managers, well-known broadcasters, a member of the royal household and others with royal connections, and a woman going through well-publicised divorce proceedings".

Sadly, the *News of the World* and every other paper was too busy documenting alleged rows between Alex Ferguson and Sven Goran Erikkson over Wayne Rooney's match fitness and the break-up of Paul and Heather McCartney at the time to notice.

HEALTHWATCH

The Daily Mail

"BURSTING with 'friendly' bacteria, they promise to boost our health by keeping rival 'bad' bacteria at bay. But many probiotic products are a waste of time and money and some may even be harmful..."

Thus did the *Daily Mail* last week break the news that had readers scurrying to clear their fridges. So what *should Mail* readers do to keep the doctor away? Given the paper's relentless diet of cancer scare stories and tales of miracle health foods, the news is... confusing.

13 May: "Regular exercise can help ward off cancer, scientists have found." But not for everyone. "Women with larger breasts are more likely to develop breast cancer, research shows."

16 May: "LIFESAVER TOMATOES! We already know they can help prevent cancer – now they're also being used to stop heart attacks and strokes." Blimey!

23 May: "Is Soya a has-bean?" The *Mail*, thankfully, has the answer: "For years it's been hailed as a superfood. But a growing number of consumer pressure groups and experts claim there is mounting evidence that soya is not healthy, and might even, in some instances, be bad for you."

29 May: Sunbathing, at least, *is* good for you. "We should cover up less in the sun... According to experts, many Britons are now getting so little sunlight that their bodies are failing to produce enough vitamin D. This leaves them susceptible to other forms of cancer, as well as conditions including osteoporosis, arthritis and even schizophrenia."

June 13: "Daily dose of folic acid may stop cancer." Failing that: "Aspirin may prevent prostate cancer." And for the main course? "Pinot Noir and carrot cake... little tips for living longer." Washed down, presumably, with: "The beer that helps the menopause."

June 19: "Women who sleep with the light on or stay up late at night could be at a greater risk of breast cancer, according to scientists."

20 June: "Cracking news! Eggs are the new superfood. New research shows that far from raising cholesterol, they can protect the heart and even ward off cancer."

23 June: "Is spinach the secret to staying slim?" Probably not... but who cares?

27 June: "Do herbal diet pills really work?" "Could a sauerkraut diet prevent cancer?"

28 June: "Eating mushrooms can help fight cancer and keep you looking younger, scientists have discovered."

30 June: "A glass of pomegranate juice a day could dramatically prolong survival for men with prostate cancer, say scientists."

1 July: Oh dear. Bad news for *Mail*-reading sunbathers who wanted to top up on Vitamin D so they are less susceptible to certain forms of cancer. "Is your sunblock doing its job properly?... People could risk damaging their skin by unknowingly soaking up too much sun."

3 July: But hang on a minute. "Sunbathing could improve your chances of surviving cancer, doctors say."

4 July: "IS YOUR X-RAY SAFE? Last week, experts claimed mammograms can increase the risk of breast cancer. So how worried should we be about all those scans?"

5 July: "Women who use hair dyes are being warned they run a substantial risk of developing cancer."

11 July: "My dog helped me conquer cancer." "Drinking herbal tea can lower the risk of developing breast cancer." But even better, "From superbugs to sore throats, manuka honey is the answer for everything."

13 July: "Women who work long hours lead more unhealthy lives than men, researchers have found."

18 July: "Fish oil capsules could prevent bowel cancer." But just in case, "Turn down your hairdryer. Eat dried figs. How to stay healthy in 15 very unlikely steps."

19 July: More bad news for Vitamin D deficient readers: "WHAT THE SUN COULD DO TO YOU TODAY: IF ALL YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT IS A TOUCH OF SUNBURN, LOOK AT WHAT ELSE COULD BE HAPPENING TO YOUR BODY."

2 August: "An exotic mushroom dubbed 'the elixir of long life' could be the latest weapon in the fight against cancer, scientists said yesterday." Presumably it's better than the ordinary mushrooms the paper was advocating a month ago.

3 August: "Vitamin supplements do not work and may do more harm than good, experts have warned." And "Children who were breastfed are better at coping with stress than their bottle-fed classmates, research shows."

4 August: "Curry could help improve mental agility and stave off Alzheimer's disease, it was claimed yesterday."

7 August: "Women who divorce are 50 percent more likely to develop heart disease in later life than those who stay married, experts claim." As for those with dyed hair and big breasts who work long hours and sleep with the light on, they might as well just give up now... or switch newspapers.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Journalists are at their most perfunctory when they are used simply as conduits... And if celebrity PRs had their way, conduits are all we'd ever be."

– Dylan Jones, the *Independent*, 11 May 2006.

"Yes the agents and the publicists and the managers have more power, but only because the entertainment industry itself is more pervasive than it's ever been. But all this does is force us to work much, much harder."

– Dylan Jones, writing in PR mag *Editorial Intelligence*, July 2006.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

Number crunchings

6 ■ Planes targeted by terrorists according to Financial Times

9 ■ Planes targeted by terrorists according to Daily Mirror

10 ■ Planes targeted by terrorists according to Independent

12 ■ Planes targeted by terrorists according to Guardian

I.T. HAPPENS

THE National Audit Office (NAO) report into how HM Revenue and Customs managed to get shot of pisspoor computer contractors EDS and Accenture when it switched IT provider to Capgemini two years ago reveals that the government was only able to sack the two firms by chucking cash at them and at their competitors.

The payments were justified in the interests of promoting competition for the contract, which high profile disasters such as tax credits had threatened. So, to go with its new £4bn contract, Capgemini was paid £37.6m in "transition costs" – including a handy 15.5 percent profit margin.

To encourage the impression of free competition for the contract, even the unsuccessful bidders' costs of £8.6m were reimbursed in a competition that had no losers.

The outgoing firms then received a further £6.7m for "supporting the transition process" – £2.3m to EDS and £3.4m to Accenture – despite their lamentable performance over a decade. They were thus given taxapayers' money simply to go away quietly and help the new boys take over – despite the fact that EDS screwed up tax credits so badly even Labour demanded compensation, while Accenture (then Andersen Consulting) brought in the national insurance record system NIRS2 that went £165m over budget and caused £100m to be paid in compensation to the public.

Most galling of all, buried in the small print of the report was news that Accenture was paid £14m for the rights to use the NIRS2 intellectual property it was handed under the original 1995 PFI deal (a feature that was so heavily criticised it forced the government to stop using PFI for IT deals). This was the ultimate windfall for a company that the government could have sued for compensation six years ago but did not because Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo decided that "taking action against Andersen Consulting would prejudice the partnership relationship now established between it and the Inland Revenue".

YET another government website redesign has gone horribly awry – this time at the Department of Trade and Industry, which spent £175,000 on a site designed by Fresh01 and implemented by the department's IT supplier, Fujitsu *(Eyes passim)*.

The finished site went live in May, proudly proclaiming: "This website meets the W3C web accessibility initiative AA-level standard." W3C standards are designed to ensure that websites work with all web browsers, including those with special features for people with visual impairment or other disabilities. But the DTI's shiny new website doesn't.

Two bloggers with an interest in web accessibility issues, Dan Champion (www.blether.com) and Bruce Lawson (www.brucelawson.co.uk) noticed this failure and have been chasing the DTI via freedom of information law to find out what went wrong. They discovered that the requirements document given to the contractors says it was a "key objective" that the final website "must comply" with level AA of the standards, should be "a leading example of usable, accessible web design" and that there should have been "a robust programme of usability testing carried out during the design and build phase".

"The statement relating to accessibility was an error," the bloggers were told. "It was removed from the website on 19 May 2006 when we reviewed the site in light of the questions raised."

They sent more questions, asking how the DTI had planned to monitor that the website met the standards (other than waiting for bloggers to do the work for them) and whether the companies involved remained on lists of preferred suppliers. However, the DTI wrote back saying that answering those questions would cost more than £600, so they were "not obliged" to deal with the request.

So, DTI spent £175,000 on a website that doesn't meet the requirements it set but won't spend £600 on answering questions that might just help them get the next expensive redesign right.

HERE'S HEALTH

NO SOONER had the prime minister visited the Boots HQ in Nottingham and lauded the company's efforts in "pioneering a whole range of new ways to engage their customers with healthy living", than Boots launched a big push for one of its best-selling products... Walkers Crisps.

Punters hoping to engage with healthy living were greeted by staff in T-shirts carrying a picture of a large packet of crisps and the slogan "Happy Lunch".

Boots has clearly impressed health official as it is in line to host NHS services in its stores. This means shoppers will be able to stuff themselves with high fat, high salt snacks... while waiting for their blood pressure and cholesterol test results.

SAVILLE ROW

WHEN Tessa Jowell justified the refusal to hold a public inquiry into last year's 7 July bombings in London by pointing out that the Bloody Sunday inquiry would cost £400m and that such extravagance should be avoided, eyebrows were raised as the bill is officially supposed to be £163m.

Northern Ireland Office officials rushed to brief that Jowell's numbers were simply wrong – but was she really so wide of the mark? The bill is still climbing and several factors could push it much higher.

Although Tony Blair established the tribunal in 1998, it's possible he'll have left office before it reports. Last year, chairman Lord Saville and his two remaining co-judges predicted that they would deliver before Easter 2006. Now summer 2007 is suggested, while the legal costs, as well as the cost of the secretariat and PR team, keep ticking away.

One fear is that the judges may split and issue their own separate conclusions about each of the deaths. If that happens, there would be numerous applications for judicial review, most citing the Human Rights Act, as relatives, march organisers, soldiers and policemen all challenge the legality of the proceedings. Add the cost of any trials which eventually go ahead, and possible trips to Strasbourg in the meantime, and Jowell's £400m may, after a few more years' wrangling, turn out to be a fair estimate.

TERROR CRISIS Blair Acts

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER NEWS

WHY did the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Lt Gen David Richards, announce on 11 August that British troops were about to lead "a major combat offensive against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan"?

After all, they have been involved in a major combat offensive against the Taliban in the same area for weeks. "This sort of thing has not happened... since the Korean War or the Second World War," said Richards himself of recent engagements.

The day before, a damning parliamentary defence select committee report was published. It concluded that operations in Afghanistan were being done on "a shoe string", with overstretched soldiers having to work with pisspoor kit and an equally poor re-supply chain.

So is the committee mistaken... or is Richards really about to commit knackered and ill-equipped troops to a major push, months before the armoured vehicles and air support promised by the Ministry of Defence can make it into theatre?

In fact the "major offensive" is a kind of tactical withdrawal, as well as an implicit acknowledgment of the committee's findings. Soldiers are being removed from remote locations where they cannot safely be resupplied because they are under constant attack from often larger groups of Taliban insurgents. Once withdrawn, they can be more highly concentrated and moved around more effectively in our tiny fleet of clapped out helicopters.

This will buy time for the MoD to rush over the new armoured cars and air assets that the troops should have been equipped with in the first place.

'Square Basher'

RYAN FAIR?

RYANAIR, the first airline to break ranks by objecting to body searches and transparent bags, is none too keen on transparency in its business dealings either.

The Information Commissioner has booked two days at Londonderry Courthouse in October for a public hearing to decide whether Derry City Council must supply secret details of its relationship with Ryanair.

Since 1994 the council has operated a small airport. People living nearby suspect the council has made illegal payments or subsidies to Ryanair and believe that if FOI requests for the disclosure of relevant documentation are approved, they'll be able to find enough documentation to take their case to court in Europe.

In 2003 Ryanair demanded that the council spend £14m knocking down 19 homes in the hamlet of Donnybrewer to lengthen the runway – solely to accommodate Ryanair's new, larger planes. Failure to obey would mean the airline axing its services. Yet the current runway is longer than the one at Belfast's George Best Airport, used by the likes of British Airways, bmi and flybe. And even without the extension, Ryanair has added two routes this year, suggesting that the council should have called the airline's bluff, reasoning that even if it pulled out, other airlines would fill the profitable void.

In 2004 the EU fined Ryanair €4m over illegal subsidies from a deal with Charleroi airport in Belgium.

In February the Information Commissioner upheld the residents' disclosure requests, which should have cleared everything up, but the council appealed, saying it has a duty to afford Ryanair "maximum commercial confidentiality".

POSTCARD FROM ULSTER

THE bills are starting to arrive following last week's Real IRA (RIRA) bomb attacks in the Ulster border town of Newry, which targeted vital British military installations including Carpetrite, TK Maxx, JJB Sports and MFI.

Early estimates put the cost of rebuilding at more than £10m, and since insurance companies do not cover acts of terrorism, the government's Compensation Agency for Northern Ireland will have to stump up.

Although the attacks coincided with the anniversary of the introduction in 1971 of internment without trial, which is usually commemorated with some form of violence, neither MI5 nor the police anticipated that incendiary devices would be planted this year. As a result there was no security checkpoint on the northern side of the border.

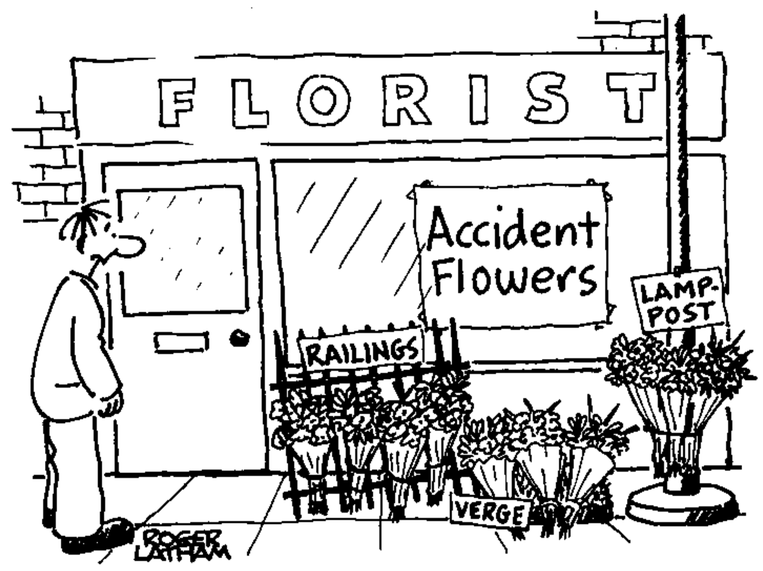
Checkpoints might also have prevented the planting of two roadside bombs, the second of which was discovered only on Sunday night (during which security forces came under attack from 30 petrol bombs and assorted missiles, launched by local insurgents some of whom were described as being aged around 10).

And the Dublin-Belfast railway line might not still have been (very expensively) closed until Monday morning as soldiers nervously carried out the fifth day of searches for devices the RIRA said had been left on the track.

The absence of protective measures is blamed on both a complete lack of intelligence that the attacks were imminent, and the effects of the "normalisation" process now Tony Blair has solved the Irish Question.

In reality the virtually bankrupt Ministry of Defence's desperation to cut manpower costs is the major factor, although overtime for troops and police on border patrols would have been much cheaper than rebuilding half a dozen major retail units.

The RIRA meanwhile appears to be recruiting heavily and fundraising has improved – not least because, despite repeated pleas to Washington by the families of the Omagh victims, the Bush administration has failed to shut down US-based websites run by the terrorists' political wing, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM).



Down on the Farm

"IF YOU'RE in a hole", as the saying goes, "stop digging." But what do you do if you are Defra and find yourself in a black hole – one which perpetually sucks everything in until it disappears into nothingness?

The question is provoked by the news that the Department for the Elimination of Farming faces a massive £200m cut in its funding by the Treasury because of the astronomic costs of its "single farm payment" fiasco and the millions it has thrown away on saving us all from an epidemic of Asian bird flu (the one the WHO told us was going to kill 150 million people – Defra believed it).

Not only did Defra hand out £37m to Accenture (aka Arthur Andersen) to organise its non-payment of Brussels subsidies to farmers (what was the Rural Payments Agency meant to be doing for its wages when that was the only job it was set up to do?) But it then had to pay out millions more, to consultants, mapping experts, even sixth formers brought in after school, in a desperate bid to sort out the utter shambles Accenture had made of it all.

The upshot of all this chucking of oodles of good money after bad (thank you, taxpayers) is that Gordon Brown has decided that Defra must pay the bill out of its budgeted funding, leaving the department suddenly short of the odd £200m. And that, Defra has decided, is not going to be clawed back by sacking Accenture or the boss of the Rural Payments Agency (he's been sacked already, to save the face of the Great Caravanner who was in charge of farming until the Beloved Leader put her in charge of foreign policy.)

No, the £200m will be "saved" by cutting a whole lot of other budgets, starting with the various agencies which Defra's crackpot empire nominally has under its sway.

The Environment Agency, for instance, has been told to cut back savagely (£24m) on flood defences (so much less useful than keeping the Environment Agency's 12,000-strong army of officials sitting in their comfortable offices to preside over that miracle of efficiency, Britain's waste disposal system). And Natural England, Defra's latest monument to useless bureaucracy, is to have £12m lopped off its budget even before it starts work this autumn.

But that still leaves £164m to be cut from Defra's other activities, most of which will in one way or another involve farmers. There is, for instance, the "environmental stewardship" scheme devised by Brussels as a clever way to switch CAP spending away from subsidising grain mountains into something the voters might think was giving them better value for money – ie looking after the "environment".

However, it is one thing for Brussels to make the cash available. The trouble is that payments under the "environmental stewardship" scheme must be "match-funded" by member state governments. In other words, for every pound of our money Brussels offers to give us back, the Treasury must promise to cough up another pound before Brussels will hand it over. You can guess Gordon's response to that idea. Much better that we should allow Brussels to spend the money on a new sewage system for Budapest, and let our farmers do Defra's "saving" for it.

'Muckspreader'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WESTERN allies may be gripped by the furore over the airline bomb plot, but no one is panicking in Brussels where the spooks and their advisers have shut up shop for the summer.

The existence of a "coordinating centre" in Brussels that allows the EU's national security services to work together (quite important at this moment, one might have thought) only emerged by chance when EU Justice and Security Commissioner Franco Frattini gave an interview to the Italian newspaper *L'Espresso* last month and mentioned creating "a centre of various coordinated secret services".

Back in June, after the Council of Europe accused 14 European states of colluding with the CIA in secret "rendition" flights, Frattini had called for "tighter parliamentary scrutiny" of the EU's national secret services. But Frattini's "coordinating centre" doesn't appear to have had much parliamentary scrutiny at all.

And no wonder. When the Italian reporter pointed out that this was the first he had heard of such a centre, Frattini replied: "We have not publicised the initiative a lot, obviously… [Javier] Solana [foreign policy commissioner] and I have given a big push and encouraged ministries of different countries to nominate their representatives."

Frattini explained that the centre – "something more than a club for analysing" intelligence – had been active for a year. But when the *Eye* tried to contact the European Commission's spokespeople for "Justice Freedom and Security" for details of the centre's funding, staffing, which nations were participating and what kind of parliamentary oversight was in place for its activities, we were met with a barrage of automated messages saying they were all "en vacances" until September.

We then tried asking the officials of the European Parliament's committees on justice and security whether their MEPs had ever had any form of scrutiny of this centre. The reply? "This mailbox will not be read during August so we will process your request in September. Excuse the inconveniences and have a nice summer."

Er, thanks.

IT TOOK 14 years to produce… but the European Union's clampdown on cross-border tax evasion, in the shape of the EU savings tax directive, is also turning out to be a flop.

The directive, implemented last July, forces banks to give information on savings income to the authorities in the account holder's home country. But to get a number of the world's more secretive financial centres, such as the Channel Islands and Switzerland, to sign up their banks, they were allowed to keep details of accounts quiet as long as they withheld tax on income and passed most of it to the saver's taxman.

Now figures for tax handed over from these territories suggest that most people who hold money offshore have found ways round the directive (they are, after all, not averse to a spot of tax dodging). Jersey, for example, handed over just €13m euros in six months – a fraction of the €100m experts from the Tax Justice Network reckon it should have.

The reason is the gaping loopholes in the directive. Putting money in an offshore trust of the sort a Channel Islands lawyer can set up in two minutes, for example, neatly sidesteps the rules. This was always likely to happen, as critics have long pointed out. Yet when the agreements under which Jersey and others would be forced to come clean were pushed through the UK parliament last year, Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo was forced to admit to one MP: "I am not yet able to tell him exactly how the agreements will apply to trusts established in Crown dependencies". Thus a gaping loophole passed into law.

Other EU member states are reportedly none too happy as they were led to believe that the rules *did* apply to trusts. Now if their wealthier inhabitants fancy a spot of tax dodging, they can do so quite easily courtesy of a couple of rocks in the English Channel.

The rules will be reviewed in 2008, after which it will take a few more years to shut the loopholes and probably introduce a few more. And so on. That's tax lawmaking, EU style.

EU-phemisms

The commissioners are all on holiday

EYE TV

Big Brother
(Channel 4)

WHAT is it with Channel 4 and shows with the word "Big" in the title? Not since they decided the way to recapture the glory days of Chris Evans and Gaby Roslin on *The Big Breakfast* was to give their jobs to children's entertainer Rick Adams and swimmer Sharron Davies has a show been as comprehensively and cluelessly misproduced as the current run of *Big Brother*, which limps to a close this Friday after more than a quarter of a year on air.

Mistake number one may have been to fill the house with contestants more in need of emergency intervention from social services than exposure on national TV, but that long since ceased being an issue for the channel which has for several years clogged up its schedules with docuscum programmes like *Supernanny, Wife Swap* and *How Clean is Your House.*

To make the combination so unbearable that three of them walk within a fortnight – even if you disguise one departure as an expulsion, "punishing" a housemate who has spent two days begging to leave by throwing them out – is more problematic. But changing the rules every five minutes in a blatant attempt to manipulate the outcome and *still* managing to screw things up looks like carelessness.

First twist came with the Golden Ticket, an exciting sponsorship cash-in which allowed an "ordinary viewer" to enter the house – a wheeze obviously inspired by the inclusion of Chantelle in the last series of *Celebrity Big Brother*, with no one apparently noticing that the point was that that time her fellow housemates *weren't* ordinary viewers. Frantic trading on eBay saddled the producers with a choice of 35 desperadoes, most of whom had already been rejected as unsuitable for the show at at least one audition. The winner – Susie – had the papers shrieking "set-up" until it emerged that she was exactly as dull, level-headed and determined not to embarrass herself as you might expect any member of the public plucked at random (as opposed to carefully cultivated through several rounds of auditions) to be.

Then came the House Next Door, so obviously dreamed up in a last minute panic that it had to be crammed into the tiny amount of unused square footage on the studio lot and constructed in full earshot of the housemates, who swiftly and unexcitedly deduced that they were to face the same "surprise" twist that had been sprung around the mid-way point of the last two series.

This introduced Jayne, a repellent slab of vileness even by *Big Brother* standards, whose burping, rule-breaking and thoughtless offensiveness swiftly reduced both housemates and viewers to a state of teeth-grinding misery. Having watched their biggest characters (for which read most obnoxious bullies) get voted out one by one, producers were determined to take no chances with Jayne, and safeguarded her residency by putting everyone else up for eviction, confident that this would sift out one of the boring ones – only to watch spoiled brat Nikki, relentlessly pitched as the show's one bona fide star, get turfed out by an ungrateful public. Berlusconi-like, producers insisted that this clear democratic choice made from a full field of candidates could only mean that the public wanted to see more of Nikki, and threw the entire principle of the show away in favour of "allowing" viewers to make good their mistake and spend even more of their cash voting her back in.

Nikki, carefully groomed by her new agent and inculcated in the relative value of magazine deals for loving couples as opposed to singletons, duly declared her love for Pete on re-entry – at the same time as phoneline watchdog ICSTIS announced an official investigation which could result in the programme losing its premium-rate facilities and having to refund every viewer able to point to a wasted vote on their phone bill.

So, what did *Big Brother* achieve in 2006? Well, it proved that someone with Tourettes has just as much right to humiliate himself on television as anyone else, and that reality stars with disabilities can look forward to a future of being treated like small cuddly pets by fellow contestants and media alike (not that this seems to bother Pete himself, who has long since discovered that this is a very effective way of getting girls with big jubblies to let you cuddle them). It also disposed of the widely-held myth that Tourettes is characterised solely by uncontrollable swearing by housing Pete alongside Lisa, a woman so potty-mouthed she induced feelings of nihilistic despair in all viewers over the age of 17.

Having done wonders in the campaign for homosexual equality by launching Brian Dowling on a kids TV presenting career, it clawed back much of the ground gained by presenting us with "Paki poof" Shabaz and "Sexual Terrorist" Richard arguing over who was the biggest embarrassment to gay men. It proved that Davina McCall was not just having an off-month when she presented her BBC chat show (quizzing Grace, a noxious bully who had inspired such hatred that the public had actually been gathering at the studios to chant for her eviction for several weeks, she hit her with the Paxmanesque inquiry: "Where did you buy your shoes?"). It proved that you cannot pad a few minutes of material out to an hour every night, and still have enough left over for spin-off shows – *Big Brother's Little Brother, Big Brother's Big Mouth, Big Brother's Medium-sized Idea Stretched To Breaking Point.* And it proved that, like the *Big Breakfast* before it, this is a franchise that has outlived its time, lost its way and squandered the innovation it once briefly had.

Last week another broadcaster announced that it planned to bid for the format, which comes up for auction this autumn. That sums it up really: *Big Brother* – So Bad These Days It Could Be on ITV.

'Yoof'

"It's reality ITV"

MEDIA NEWS

SO FAREWELL, Charles Allen – finally pushed out of his top job at ITV.

While Allen pleads to be remembered for bringing shows like *Cracker* to the channel, others might recall another major contribution to British television: ITV Digital.

The company collapsed in 2002 without honouring its commitments to the Nationwide football league clubs it had promised to pay for TV rights while its then parent companies, Granada (run by Allen) and Carlton washed their hands of the affair. The ensuing financial crises at scores of lower league clubs saw hundreds of players lose their jobs. On short-term contracts, most of the modestly paid journeymen received little if any compensation.

Allen, on the other hand, is reported to be picking up a £2m bonus as he leaves (only about one hundredth of the shortfall in ITV's ad revenue this year)! And he can always soothe his injured pride by indulging his evident passion for sport… as vice-chairman of the organising committee for the London Olympics!

NOW that his political TV shows are off the air for the summer recess, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill can devote more time to other outposts of his vast media empire. They could certainly do with some TLC.

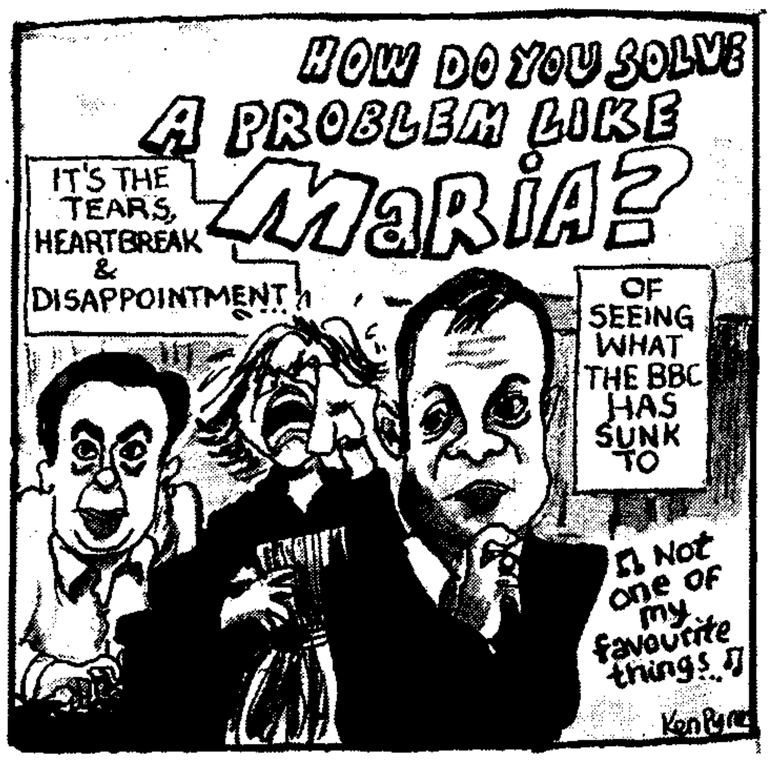
When not running the *Spectator*, the *Business* and, er, handbag.com for the Barclay twins, Brillo is also chairman of World Media Rights (WMR), a fund he launched at Cannes last autumn. It would raise £30m and "transform the way investment in media takes place", he boasted, adding that WMR "will unveil its first deals in November".

November 2005 came and went; nothing happened. In February this year Brillo told the *Evening Standard* that WMR "hopes to raise up to £100m". He promised "a big announcement that will knock people's socks off" in April, at a TV industry get-together in France. April came and went; nothing happened.

Perhaps Brillo has been distracted by yet another ambitious scheme. In March this year he became chairman of ITP, the Middle Eastern publisher which produces Dubai editions of *Time Out* and *Campaign*. "The dynamic of Dubai makes it an excellent place to do business and I look forward to working with the talented ITP team to expand the business in the region and beyond," he raved.

Two months later he revealed the first fruits of this dynamic partnership – the *Arabian Business Standard*, a new Dubai-based daily which would launch immediately after Ramadan in October 2006. He had hired former *Observer* business hack Frank Kane as editor, "to send a signal to the market place about our seriousness of purpose".

Alas! Word reaches Lord Gnome that the October launch has been postponed. Readers in the Gulf states may have to wait until 2007 to have their socks blown off.


HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE MARIA?
IT'S THE TEARS, HEARTBREAK & DISAPPOINTMENT
OF SEEING WHAT THE BBC HAS SUNK TO
Not one of my favourite things!
Ken Pyne

DUMB BRITAIN

Bullseye, Challenge
Jim Bowen: Which artist is famous for his drawings of fat little girls on fat little ponies?
Contestant: Is it Turner, Jim?

Deadly Knowledge Show, Channel 4
Presenter: Was Paul Cezanne an impressionist or a ventriloquist?
Contestant: Ventriloquist.

Steve Wright's "Big Quiz", Radio 2
Wright: Who played the title role in the 1970s show The Six Million Dollar Man?
Contestant: Steve Austin.
Wright: No, that was the character. We want the actor.
Contestant: Majors! John Majors!

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Watercolours And Drawings From The Collection Of Queen Elizabeth The
Evening Standard

GOING LIVE

ON 10 August, the death of Private Leigh Reeves, killed in an accident at the British base in Kabul, was announced by the MoD. He was serving with the Royal Logistic Corps.

His death was reported by Natasha Kaplinsky on the BBC *Six O'Clock News* who revealed that "a soldier from the Royal Logistical Corpse" had died.

"THE BBC is now little more than a vast, Left-Liberal propaganda vehicle, whose income is derived through the threat of jail for anyone who does not pay," thundered Stephen Pollard in one of the *Daily Mail*'s regular anti-BBC rants in April.

"Take the one area where the BBC does enter the market – its commercial arm, BBC Worldwide. BBC Worldwide exists on the back of the licence fee, putting the revenue it earns to purely commercial ends, from investment in film and TV production, to global programme sales and satellite channels. Books, DVDs, CDs, clothing and all sorts of commercial activities combined to give BBC Worldwide profits of £145million last year. But it does so with an unfair advantage over other companies."

Disgusting! Unless the *Mail* is getting a slice of the pie too. Last week the paper gave away a series of co-branded *Daily Mail* and BBC DVDs featuring "children's favourites" such as the Tweenies, Fimbles, Bill and Ben and Tikkabilla, in a commercial tie-in with WH Smith and... er, BBC Worldwide.

BIRTSPEAK

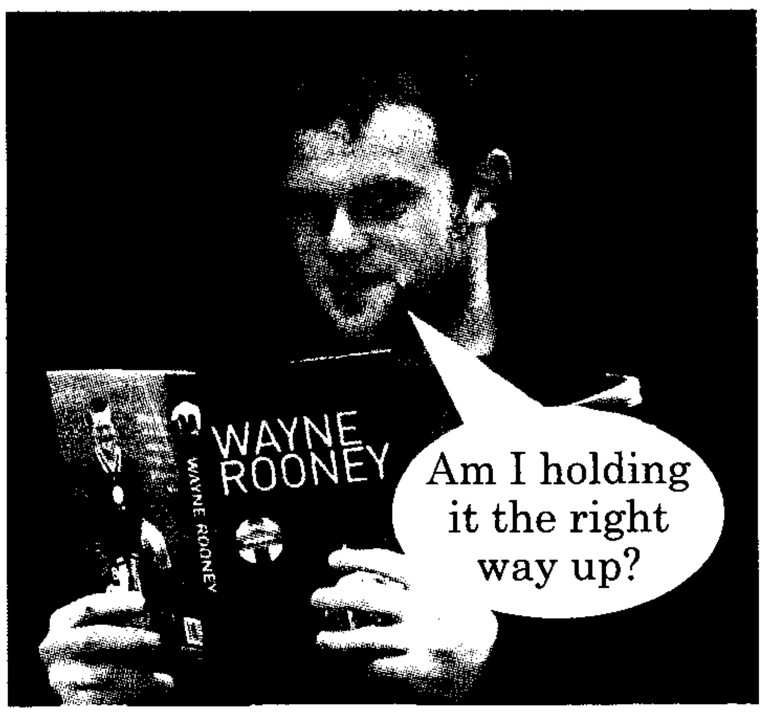
AN exciting innovation at Radio 3 – "the station buffet". But staff have been disappointed to learn that it isn't simply a chance to browse and sluice.

A recent memo from Abigail Appleton, head of speech programming, informed them that the next buffet "will be devoted to a presentation by Procurement of the new purchasing tool coming in with Future Finance – please try and make it".

A week later, she added enticingly: "The more regular Station Buffet returns. This will give the next reviewing team a chance to prepare their thoughts on an area of content output. As proposed at the review brainstorm I will produce a rota for these presentations… If you are selected it will be your task to find a friend or two to join you – preferably from another area of the department or our partners: schedules/planning, interactive, resources, factual, press and marketing etc. As a team you can then select the area of output."

No one at Radio 3, apart from Abigail Appleton, has the faintest idea what any of this means.

"The bride and groom will now cut the coke"



AD NAUSEAM

POSTERS go up this week featuring the footballer Thierry Henry as the new face of Reebok. They form part of a £20m global multi-media campaign that also features the Spanish goalkeeper Iker Casillas, Chelsea's latest megabuy Andriy Shevchenko and, somewhat bizarrely, the actress Scarlett Johansson.

Henry's strapline is "I Don't Go Anywhere Without Good Reason", a reference to his choosing to remain at Arsenal after long-running speculation that he would move to Barcelona this summer. It also, however, carries with it a pleasing irony as *Eye* readers will recall that Henry did indeed leave his former sponsors Nike this summer to join their arch-rivals, the Adidas-owned Reebok. So what was the good reason Henry switched teams? Around £9m.

THESE days supermarket giant Asda proudly advertises itself as, "A part of the Wal-mart Family", so it was with some surprise that Asda's website was advertising copies of the newly-released DVD "Wal-mart - The High Cost of Low Prices" last week.

Lo and behold, three days later the page was gone, leaving only a "Sorry, we cannot find the product you are looking for." Sold out, no doubt.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"We strongly believe that the sale of alcoholic drinks at low cost... is not consistent with the promotion of responsible drinking."

– Scottish & Newcastle's submission on "below cost" booze to the Competition Commission's inquiry into supermarket sales of beer and cider.

"We've teamed up with Strongbow – makers of Sirrus – to beat the heatwave by offering every reader a 500ml bottle of this fabulous new premium cider."

– Sainsbury's free cider coupon in the Sun. *(Strongbow is owned by Scottish & Newcastle.)*

TERRORBALLS

WITHIN hours of the terror alerts which brought Britain's airports to a standstill, BT's marketing department seized the opportunity to do its bit for national security.

"Your Meetings, Your Choice," was the title of an email circulated on the evening of 10 August, when planes were still grounded at Heathrow. "Business travel has again hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. Today it is the heightened risk and inconvenience of travel... **You can do more to help:** With the escalating risk and inconvenience of travelling, particularly flying, could you replace a planned meeting with a conference call? If you use your BT MeetMe account to chair more than five remote meetings between 10th August 2006 and 30th September 2006, then we will enter you into a free prize [draw] to win an Apple iPod."

FE NEWS

MORE discomfiture for bosses at Manchester College of Arts and Technology, where in June an employment tribunal ruled that five lecturers in the trade union education department had been sacked by principal Peter Tavernor for being Natfhe activists (*Eye* 1162).

Meanwhile allegations of fraud, which first surfaced in 2004 when lecturers complained of being asked to fiddle paperwork (marking absent students as present so Mancat could gain extra money from the Learning and Skills Council) refuse to go away.

They are now being looked into by the National Audit Office (NAO), but will it finally look at the whistleblowing letter sent to the governing body by a former admin manager in 2003? She described in detail being ordered to commit fraud from 1999-2002.

Assistant principal Bernard Priest says the allegations are malicious old hat and that Mancat has been given a clean bill of health in previous investigations; but in fact these claims have never been thoroughly investigated by any outside body. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) never interviewed the whistleblower or asked to see her evidence; and last year the college settled her claim for constructive dismissal, preventing all from being revealed at tribunal and making the settlement conditional on a gagging order. The LSC used this as an excuse not to probe deeper. It was content to let an in-house inquiry deal with the matter – which found any fraud allegations unproven. Tony Foster, a governor who chaired the audit committee and a lone voice calling for external scrutiny, resigned after being shouted down by Tavernor.

The whistleblower has told the NAO she's prepared to talk if it takes the matter more seriously than the LSC. Yet several months into its investigation the NAO is making the same noises about her gagging order, telling her they are concerned about breach of confidentiality and saying they cannot guarantee her immunity from prosecution.

SCOTTISH ministers are at last about to find £25m to buy back West Lothian College from its disastrous private finance contract (*Eye* 1132).

Finance Minister Tom McCabe admitted to *The Herald* that the original contract had been "predicated on extremely optimistic student numbers" and promised to now do "what's in the best interests of the college".

The college has struggled to pay its annual £1.1m "facilities management" bill since the opening of the state-of-the-art campus in 2001; and in 2003 new principal Sue Pinder dubbed the deal "a pig's arse". By last year the college had debts of £4.3m and, despite cost-cutting measures and staff cuts being made to meet the payments, the *Eye* predicted "yet another expensive bail-out from public funds".

As the college is currently less than two-thirds full and is unable to recruit more students due to funding issues, most of the "futuristic study facilities" taxpayers are about to buy won't be of any use to anyone.

Number crunching

£40 ■ Yearly cost of joining the website of parenting guru Gina Ford in order to access her childrearing advice

£0 ■ Cost of joining Mumsnet, the parents' advice-sharing website Gina Ford threatened legal action to get closed down over "defamatory" comments

MEDICINE BALLS

2. The state of public health

CHIEF medical officer Sir Liam Donaldson is a busy man. Not only has he knocked off 218 pages on regulating doctors (see last *Eye*) but he's also released his 80-page annual report on "the state of public health."

This contains no fewer than 28 photos of Sir Liam, including a moody, back-lit Rodin-esque cover. His touch of the Kilroy-Silks also extends to the foreword: "I am to serve the public by championing the need for action on the major health problems of the day and to act without fear or favour…" [you don't say!] "…I am 15th in a line of succession that dates back to 1855…" But despite the fighting talk, Donaldson increasingly resembles the health service ombudsman, highlighting the same problems year on year.

Public health in the UK is a shambles. Obesity, smoking, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, disability and mental illness are as prevalent as ever, and infectious disease is coming back as vaccination levels fall.

Shortcomings in patient safety are still costing the NHS £3bn a year, and that's five years after the National Patient Safety Agency was established. But the biggest issue is still health inequality. Children born in affluent areas have nearly a decade of extra life expectancy than those born in some city areas, where levels of health are akin to the 1950s.

Donaldson's rant against inappropriate variations in NHS treatment, especially of the poor, is akin to Frank Dobson's, the Health Secretary when New Labour came into office nine years ago.

Why so little progress? A key factor is the continuous "re-disorganisation" of the NHS under Labour, which has decimated Donaldson's own specialty of public health. This relies on a coherent, well-funded strategy over decades to achieve success but has instead been ripped to shreds.

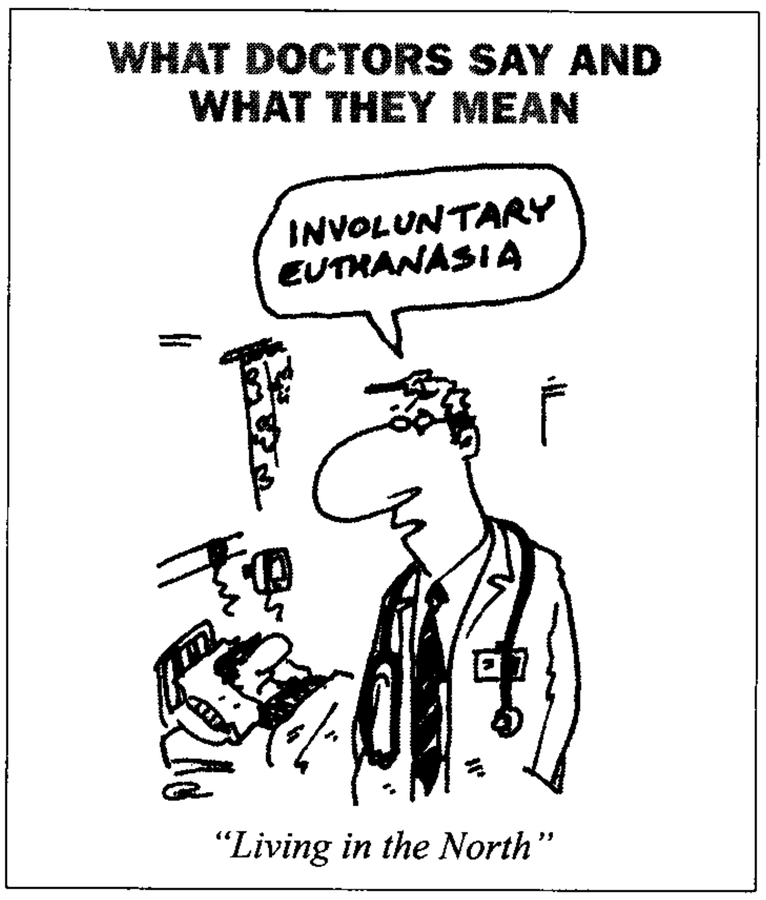
Since 2000 there has been a 20 percent loss in professors, a 22 percent loss in senior lecturers and a 59 percent loss of lecturers. It has also lost a huge chunk of its funding.

Over the last century, UK life expectancy increased by 30 years, mainly due to improvements in public health. In this century, our population is split between the risk-taking, smoking, alcoholic lard-buckets who'll die prematurely, and those who make it past retirement on ten heart tablets a day, only to spend their last decade with dementia. These are huge public health challenges that require solutions based on sound research, rather than knee jerk political reform.

The destruction of public health may well be because of its challenge to the government. As one consultant put it: "To say that there must always be change and reform is to forget the fundamental public health questions of what is the evidence for it? And what will be the health impact? Right now, there is considerable evidence that successive reorganisations of the NHS have been wasteful of time, money and people, and have not delivered service improvement."

Sir Liam does acknowledge his specialty is in peril, citing his "serious concern" at the striking local and regional differences in public health funding. This will, according to predictions in the Wanless report, reduce the potential life expectancy of women by 2.5 years and men by 2.9 years, with 50,000 extra premature deaths due to smoking by 2022. By then, Donaldson may be the only public health specialist standing. That is, if he hasn't been taken down by a terror attack during a bird flu pandemic.

M.D.



"Living in the North"

"You are being held in a queue... Please wait and you will be able to hear the sea shortly"

EDUCASHUN NEWS

OFSTED inspectors were genuinely impressed when they visited Darfield Upperwood primary school near Barnsley in December 2002.

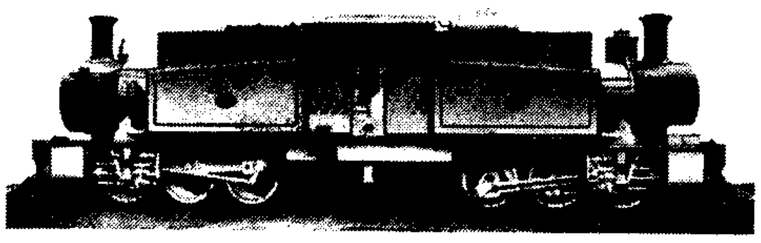
They declared it "an excellent school... leadership and management are excellent. The school gives good value for money." As a result the school, in a deprived former mining village, achieved "Beacon" status and received additional funding.

So proud was the head, David Smith, that he and the governors decided rewards were in order. A three-day staff training jolly to the De Vere hotel in Lincolnshire cost £4,000; a further £200 was spent on a Christmas party; £500 went on a retirement "do" and the head was treated to two items of "corporate clothing" (aka "suits") costing £1,200.

The icing on the cake was an eight-night trip to Salzburg, costing £1,500, taken by the head and his deputy. When the Beacon money ran out, Smith raided the school fund – money raised for educational purposes for the poorest children by parents at countless fairs and other PTA-style events.

The extent of the plundering of school funds might have remained buried had not a whistleblower within the school leaked the auditor's report to the *Yorkshire Post*. Yet still nobody wants to know. Barnsley LEA issued a statement saying that it was all a long time ago and they didn't intend doing anything about it. Ditto the school's governors. Not even local MP Jeff Ennis can get excited about a headmaster ripping off money meant to enhance the life chances of poor children. Trebles and designer suits all round!

SIGNAL FAILURES



Death row for east-west rail

CONSENT for a rowing lake near Bedford could scupper one of Britain's most cost-effective transport schemes.

By rebuilding nine miles of missing track, east-west rail would provide direct trains between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge. But Bedfordshire council has now given consent for a 2.3km rowing lake that will destroy the former rail route east of Bedford. That's bad news for the East West Rail Consortium which has spent 11 years promoting the rail scheme, supported by numerous studies. The consortium's steering group includes… Bedfordshire council.

Central government is equally contradictory. It blocked a £240m east-west project in 2001 (*Eye* 1046) but subsequently pencilled in thousands more homes along the route and major expansion of East Anglian ports. In April it announced transport grants from the community infrastructure fund for the south east but promised nothing for east-west rail. Instead it encouraged the consortium to pay consultants £300,000 for more studies, which will look only at the western half from Oxford to Bedford (for which tracks already exist).

While the east-west consortium highlights the local benefits, the scheme's national significance warrants leadership from the government. The route would relieve some of Britain's most overcrowded roads and railways for a pittance, in transport-investment terms. England's rail network is so focused on one city that scarce capacity over the last 30-odd miles into London is wasted ferrying people into the capital simply so they can catch another train out of it. East-west rail could divert those passengers by connecting all four main intercity lines, avoiding the drag of inter-station transfers in central London and eye-watering fares for peak travel into or out of the capital. The new service could also relieve the M25 by attracting motorists currently deterred by the cost, hassle and overcrowding of train travel via central London.

Freight trains from the growing eastern ports would divert to the east-west line from the cramped north London line, releasing capacity for an outer-circle metro service (Willesden-Highbury-Wapping-Clapham-Willesden) and attracting more goods off the roads. East-west rail could also relieve the west Midlands, providing a passenger route from north east to south west as an alternative to the traditional way through overcrowded Birmingham New Street.

Not only has Labour failed to lead or fund east-west rail, it hasn't even bothered protecting the missing link for future rail use. The extra cost and complication of bridging the rowing lake or building a new diversionary route for the railway will give the government an excuse to keep east-west rail even longer in the twilight zone of consultants' studies.

PS: Proposals for the next west Midlands rail franchise, which lasts until 2015, show that Labour wants east-west rail deferred at least nine more years: the government doesn't even plan to ask franchise bidders to outline services on existing tracks from Oxford/Aylesbury to Bedford/Milton Keynes.

THE government officially wants people to travel more by bicycle and train. One *Eye* reader decided to earn double Brownie points by combining the two for a trip from Birmingham to Wales.

Arriva Trains Wales advises cyclists to book ahead, as there's little room for bikes on its trains, but the reader couldn't reserve his space when buying his ticket by internet. "The on-line reservation is managed by the Trainline, so I am not able to offer any advice regarding that system," ATW responded to the reader's complaint. "The other option is to purchase the tickets through our telesales."

ATW telesales then told him it couldn't reserve a bike space on an ATW train. "The only method of making a bike reservation is to take your tickets to a manned booking office," ATW responded, unapologetically, to a second complaint. Off went the reader to Birmingham city centre… but the computer in the station booking office refused to make a bike reservation.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DUCKS OFF

SIR SIMON Milton is leader of Conservative Westminster City Council and chair of its cabinet. His close friend Robert Davis is the Tory group's chief whip, cabinet member for planning and chairman of the general purposes committee. Both sit on the important appointments committee and Davis is a member of the standards committee. He also finds time to be a solicitor in private West End practice Freeman Box.

The personal relationship between the two single, middle-aged men has been an open secret at Westminster for many years. They frequently take holidays together. Indeed, last week they were sunning themselves on the Caribbean island of St Kitts. Their relationship is not, however, declared in any register of interests.

The district auditor is currently looking into allegations that the couple were instrumental in Westminster's decision to allow Dame Shirley Porter to repay only £12.3m out of the £42m the House of Lords decided was the cost to Westminster taxpayers of her gerrymandering in the "Homes for Votes" scandal of the 1980s. Eyebrows were raised after Milton and Davis met Dame Shirley for a convivial dinner in Israel in June 2001 (*Eye* 1124) at a time when the council was trying to get its money back.

Busy Cllr Davis sometimes appears to confuse his roles as a councillor and a solicitor. One of his clients, a Soho Chinese restaurant called the Crispy Duck, applied to Westminster's licensing committee to increase its seating by 50 and extend its licensed hours. This flies in the face of the Soho area policies to protect local residents, and produced a strong objection from the local residents' association, the Soho Society.

Before the committee meeting in May, Davis wrote to both the council's environmental health officer and its licensing officer on Freeman Box headed paper. He made direct requests to them on behalf of "my clients", concerning the Soho Society's objections which he wanted withdrawn.

In an official complaint to Westminster's chief executive Peter Rogers, Labour group leader Paul Dimoldenberg said: "Councillor Davis's pivotal position in running the council makes it wholly inappropriate for him to act for clients in this way... People who have raised this matter with me feel there is a clear conflict of interest between Councillor Davis's actions as a solicitor representing clients with an interest in property in Westminster, and his cabinet responsibilities for planning as well as his role as chief whip."

Westminster's legal chief Colin Wilson said: "A conflict of interest would arise only if the member concerned was involved in its determination. Since Cllr Davis is not a member of the licensing sub-committee this does not arise."

So that's all right, then.

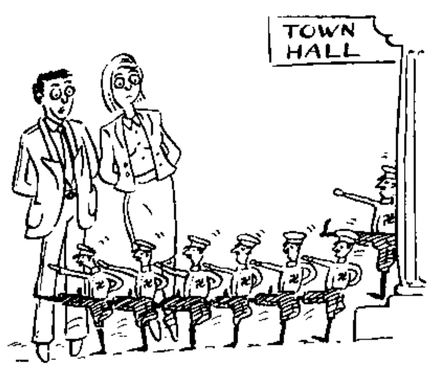
PS: The Soho Society refused to withdraw its valid objection to the Crispy Duck scheme and the application was eventually rejected. Since then, Sir Simon has told a senior member of the Soho Society twice that he is in Robert Davis's "bad books" and "Robert is very upset with you". Oh dear!

● **SO FAREWELL, then, to the London borough of Southwark's chief executive Bob Coomber, who has at last departed clutching a £200,000-plus pay-off and a six-figure pension (as forecast in *Eye* 1142, almost a year ago). Not bad at the ripe old age of 54.**

Coomber's successor is Annie Shepperd, currently chief executive at Walsall, who starts her new job next month. Shepperd comes with the good wishes of the council's staff – after all, she was one of the judges of last year's *Local Government Chronicle* awards, which gave Southwark the "Most Improved Council" gong.

Alas this enthusiasm about the award is unlikely to be shared by all of the borough's numerous black residents, coming as it did hard on the heels of a highly critical report by Lord Ouseley about rampant racism in the council.

THE BIG LIE



AN INTERESTING illustration of the way the far right poisons political debate comes from Dagenham, where the British National Party won 11 seats in May's local council elections.

A BNP newsletter, the "Barking & Dagenham Patriot", makes the extraordinary claim that 75 percent of flats in a new "affordable housing" development are being "given to Africans". The leaflet continues: "Residents are being told they do not qualify to go to the top of the housing list because they CAN speak English and their families DO live in Britain."

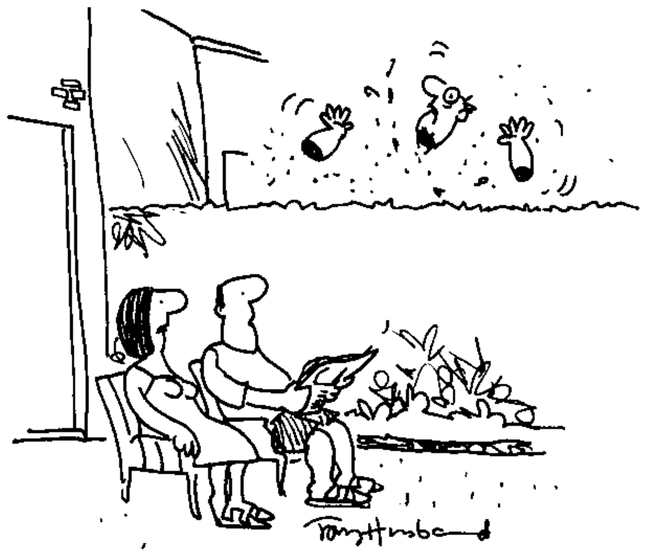
In fact residents are being told no such thing. The BNP's claim is an outright lie. Of the 58 flats in the Gale St development, 21 will go to people on the council housing waiting list and six to tenants from other boroughs, while the rest will be allocated by the Presentation housing association to "key workers" such as police officers and nurses on a first-come, first-served basis. Presentation says it is "colour blind" and keeps no record of the ethnic background of tenants. Barking and Dagenham council does, however, and has responded to the BNP's claims by pointing out that 71 percent of its own allocation in the development has in fact gone to people of "white/British" background.

Although the council says race is irrelevant to housing allocation, the fascists have succeeded in dragging the discussion of the issue on to their own territory, which was presumably the intention all along. And if the BNP has been caught out lying, so what? As one expert on these matters, much admired in BNP circles, wrote in 1925: "The grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars." Adolf Hitler, presumably, knew what he was talking about.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

IT'S YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE NANNY STATE GONE MAD!
I THOUGHT THAT LIBRARIES WERE MEANT TO BE THE PEOPLE'S GATEWAY TO LITERATURE
THANK YOU FOR NOT
· SMOKING
· EATING
· DRINKING
IN THIS LIBRARY
I DEFY ANYONE TO BE ABLE TO FULLY ENJOY PROUST WITHOUT A MADELEINE, AN ABSINTHE AND A CHEROOT...
FIGHT THE POWER, MAN!



"I knew next door would struggle with his new hedge trimmer"

BRUM DO

LONG AGO, in 1881, a collection of fine British landscape paintings by Birmingham-born artist David Cox was bequeathed to the people of Brum by the family of local woodscrew tycoon Joseph Henry Nettlefold (the man who contributed the N to engineering company GKN).

So keen were the Nettlefolds for ordinary Brummies to be able to see Cox's work that it was a condition of the bequest that the city museum and art gallery should thenceforward open on Sundays. Earlier this year Nettlefold's great-great nephew Julian, a London-based journalist, was in Birmingham for the CBI conference and dropped in to the gallery to check out the Cox pictures. To his surprise he found that only three of the 34 paintings from his ancestor's collection were on display. So where were the others?

Some were in store at the museum, but nine turned out to be adorning the offices of senior councillors such as Tory leader Mike Whitby and not on view to the general public at all. Another eight had been quietly, er, sold by the council – in 1960. The council says it has no record of to whom, or how much the sale raised.

Mr Nettlefold is now consulting m'learned friends to see whether the terms of his ancestors' bequest have been breached – and, if so, whether he can get the surviving pictures back.

Birmingham council's acting head of museums, Rita McLean, told the *Eye*: "The paintings have been regularly exhibited and published since their acquisition by the museum and a changing selection is consistently on display in the galleries. In the last 12 months 300 people have viewed works from the fine art collection, by appointment, that were not on display, of which 13 visits were in relation to works by David Cox. There is a major international Cox exhibition planned for 2008 in which key paintings from the Nettlefold gift will be featured."

● **USELESS "outsourcing" company Liberata has been up to its old tricks in Sheffield, where 758 pensioners have received threatening letters demanding that they repay housing benefit which they do not in fact owe.**

Despite the enormous distress – some frightened pensioners actually coughed-up – Liberata has so far got away with sending out 758 letters of apology and making a paltry donation of £1,000 to Age Concern.

At least this time Liberata's bungling has not killed anyone. As Eye 1028 reported in 2001, Southwark resident George Hilleard hanged himself after receiving a court summons for non-payment of council tax. The year before Southwark pensioner Frossa Carlettides suffered a heart attack on receiving a letter from Liberata (then called CSL) claiming she owed £14,525.93 in over-paid housing benefit. Like the pensioners in Sheffield, neither Hilleard nor Carlettides actually owed a penny.

BLUE SKY THINKING

WHO SAYS civil servants do nothing but stare out of the window all day?

The Office of Fair Trading has advertised for "an outstanding individual as Head of Horizon Scanning to set up a small team to take forward this work."

NOOKS and CORNERS

IS PART of the campaign to "reform" our constitution, the prime minister decided the United Kingdom should have a supreme court. The necessary act was duly passed in 2004, and the new court is destined to replace the appellate committee of the House of Lords and the judicial committee of the Privy Council.

The argument is that this highest court of appeal ought to be separate from the legislature and executive arms of government; and the act specified that the new court should have its own separate building. But where?

The then newly established Department of Constitutional Affairs noticed the Middlesex Guildhall next to Westminster Abbey on the opposite side of Parliament Square from the New Palace of Westminster. Perfect: the law lords would not have far to go from the Lords, and there is the further boon than they will feel at home in the Guildhall as it is a late example of the Gothic Revival. Their lordships will simply have to amble from one splendid Gothic interior to another.

But the Middlesex Guildhall will have to be modernised. Naturally the existing courtrooms in the building won't do: the furniture is all old-fashioned and the image is all wrong. Like New Labour, the new supreme court must be accessible and transparent, and that means lots of glass walls and designer furniture.

To do this work – ripping out floors and walls, and replacing lots of sound Edwardian joinery – the DCA employed the firm of Feilden & Mawson, who used to be reasonably good conservation architects. But for a project of this importance, this firm did not seem glamorous enough, so guess who was wheeled in as consultants: yes, the ubiquitous Foster & Partners.

Norman Foster is, of course, a designer who knows all there is to know about glass walls (and ceilings and floors), although he is an architect who should never be let near any building of any age or beauty. But don't worry: Milord Foster has just resigned from the job. Because he was concerned about the impact modernisation will have on the Middlesex Guildhall? No. It is simply that he wasn't being allowed to do things his way. As "one insider" told *The Architects' Journal*, Foster realised that "it wasn't going to be a Norman Foster building."

This is a relief – but there is still cause for concern.

There are two big problems with converting the Middlesex Guildhall into a supreme court. The first is that it is a magnificent building – listed grade II* – with superb interiors. The Guildhall was built in 1912-13 – to serve as both the home of Middlesex County Council and as an assize court – and was designed by J.G.S. Gibson who, with his partner S.B. Russell, was also responsible for Debenham's department store in Wigmore Street and 'Arding and 'Obbs at Clapham Junction.

At Westminster, in deference to his neighbours, Gibson designed in Gothic; but the result is no ordinary Gothic but a distillation of the medieval tinged with Art Nouveau. As Pevsner wrote: "In spite of the nearness to the Abbey a style essentially original even if boldly playing with Gothic motifs."

The building is enlivened by clever detail and superb sculptured friezes; the detail was by Frank Peyton Skipwith, who was killed in 1915; the sculptor was H.C. Fehr. All this can be seen from the street; what is less well known is the magnificence and originality of the interiors. The two purpose-built courts and the former Middlesex Council Chamber, now a court, are both inventive and richly furnished, all fitted out with superb oak furniture made by the Glasgow firm of Wylie & Lochhead. It is not stuff which ought to be chucked into a skip.

The second big problem is that the Middlesex Guildhall is not redundant and empty: it is a working crown court and in daily use. Furthermore, the judges do not want to go: they like the building and have seen no reason to change the interior. So if the Middlesex Guildhall is to be the supreme court, the crown court will have to be evicted. And so far the only suggestion is to exile the crown court in Isleworth, 12 miles out. Would justice and transparency be served by that? No plan has been agreed yet, but Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor, confidently expects the supreme court to be running by October 2009.

We must hope Westminster City Council will refuse planning permission and listed building consent for this wasteful and destructive scheme. But really the government ought to think again. If the supreme court is so important, for symbolic as well as functional reasons it deserves its own purpose-built new home, rather than making do with a cut-price, inadequate conversion. And why does it have to be in London?

What this business shows is the selective meanness and frivolity of Blair's government, always willing to tamper with things and then leave the job unfinished. Lord Falconer thinks converting the Middlesex Guildhall will cost a mere £35m (a figure which excludes the £18m or so needed to rehouse the crown court). Yet his old friend Tony was happy to squander £800m on a temporary plastic tent in North Greenwich.

The government should leave the Middlesex Guildhall alone and find the cash to build a proper new supreme court – but preferably *not* designed by Norman Foster.

'Piloti'

I-SPY

Weymouth, Dorset

Submitted by Tracy Scard. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IN WHAT sounded like a re-enactment of the Battle of the Braes, the quiet of a leafy Edinburgh suburb was shattered recently when the National Youth Choir of Scotland took over a boys' school to rehearse for their appearance at the London Proms.

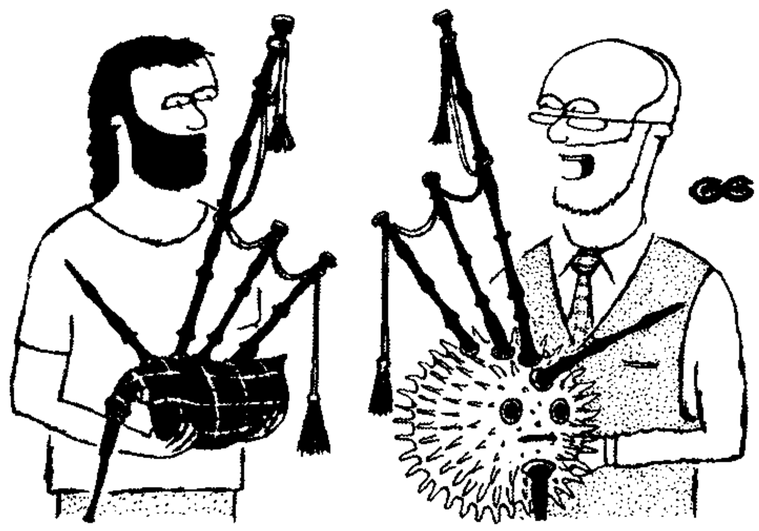
On the other side of the road the 100 pipers of the Scottish Army Piping School were doing their collective lung work too, and the effect was impressive. But were there now to be a return match, you would have to put your money on the choir, for the pipes have been silenced.

By order of the Ministry of Defence, no piper serving with Her Majesty's forces will in future be allowed to play for more than 24 minutes a day. And that's outside. Indoors, the limit is 15 minutes. The reason? Health and safety. It's imperative the soldiers don't damage their ears before going out and getting their heads blown off by, say, Taliban insurgents.

"No one becomes a serious piper with these sort of limitations," fumes the principal of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow. "It's absurd." As a result, assorted piping institutions now plan to appeal to Messrs Blair and Brown – who were both born into the tartan and appear to have no ear for music, so they might well be sympathetic.

In the meantime, the long-term prospects for military music – and even the Edinburgh Tattoo which lasts considerably more than half an hour – are anyone's guess.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

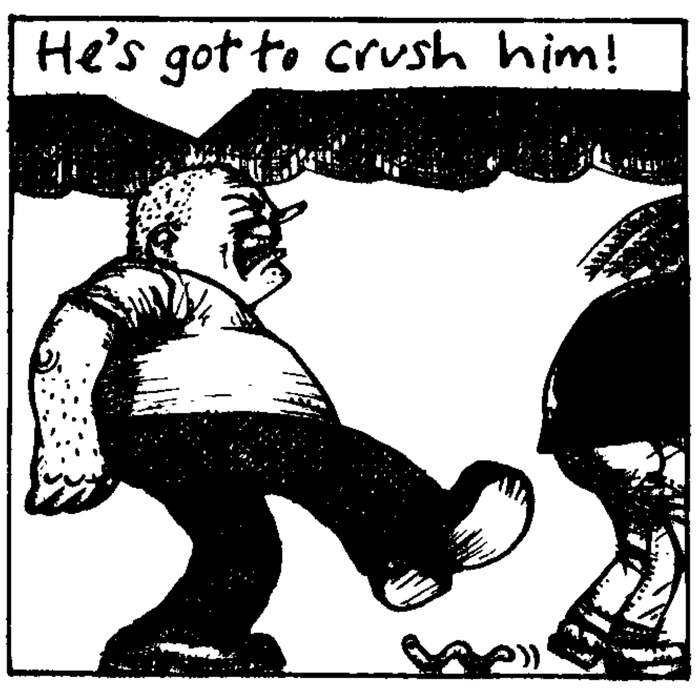


"...or there is the new puffer fish model which self-inflates"

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

What's poor Damien to do? he's being caricatured as a mega-rich corporate monster, trampling on free speech!
HIRST TAKES LEGAL ACTION AGAINST YOUNG INTERNET ARTIST.
DISPUTE OVER DOMAIN NAME
www.damienhirst.co.uk



JUST FANCY THAT

THE £828,000 compensation awarded to Helen Green for the "deliberate and concerted campaign of bullying within the ordinary meaning of that term" meted out to her by colleagues at Deutsche Bank will have come as a surprise to the charity Community Service Volunteers.

Since 1999 CSV has been running a scheme placing Deutsche Bank staff as mentors in schools in east London, where the company boasts that they help "combat bullying, poor motivation and truancy".

Letters

Snelling salts

Sir,

Your cover, Eye 1164, cartoons throughout and anti-Israeli rant quite irrelevantly headed "Hezbollah: the smoking gun?" are not only inaccurate but a disgrace, journalism in its worst form and a massive blot on your own credibility. Instead of dishing out this damaging pro-terrorist trash you would do far better to direct your energies to supporting the fully justified defensive actions taken by Israel.

I am unlikely to cancel my subscription, but don't bother to invite me to renew.

Yours,
CLIFF SNELLING,

Northampton.

Jaundiced Eye?

Sir,

And thus it came to pass that the hacks of Private Eye came back into their offices even unto their computers after a rather successful boozy lunch at the local inn. And they said unto themselves that it was not necessary to check their facts because their readership would lap up any old Bible text so long as it showed the Prophet Ehud as a bullying Israelite. Though they would all proclaimeth that some of their best friends are Jews.

But lo they forgot to say that the Hezbollah had been planning this attack for many moons, even in their cowardly way to hide their warriors, who do not wear uniform, and their rocket launchers, and all their machines of war in amongst the most vulnerable of civilian shields. And even as it came to pass that the Hezbollah launched the first attack even unto firing rockets into civilian areas of Tiberas, Haiffa and even unto Nazereth where resided their own brethren, and kidnapping soldiers, they made themselves look like the victims and the oppressed, especially unto the journalists of Private Eye.

Yours,
HAZEL KAY,

Via email.

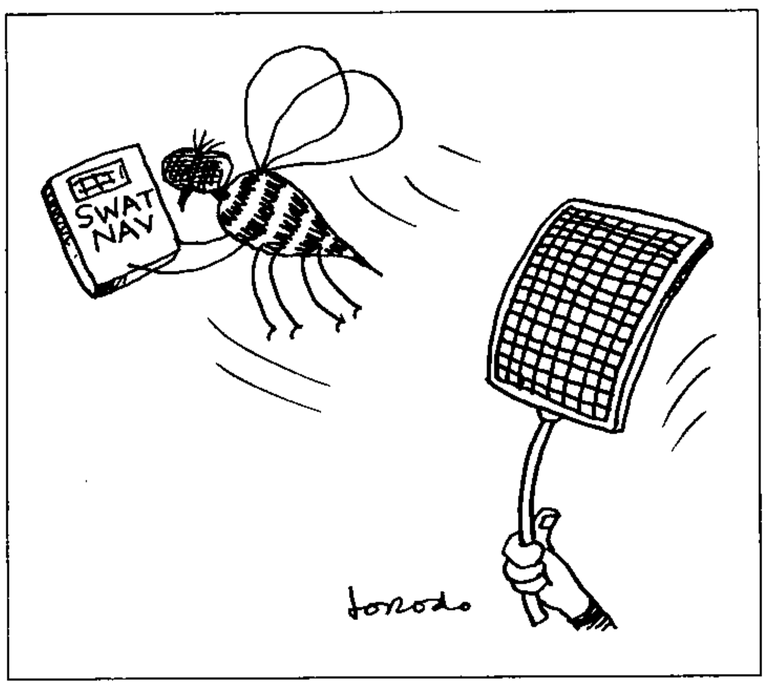
Readers' lives

Sir,

Being a female reader of your esteemed organ I got sick of rifling through FHM and Loaded on the top shelf of the Morrisons supermarket in Cheltenham. I can only assume that the word "private" got them confused. The solution? Take out a subscription.

Yours,
KAREN JAMES,

Stroud.



Not to be gagged

Sir,

I thought that Remote Controller was a bit hard on Peter Allis; the De Marco joke that he quoted was a gem. In an age when television commentators treat every idiocy spoken by sportsmen with reverence, I should have thought that Lord Gnome would have been more supportive of "the 75-year-old" Allis, who had the wit and audacity to take the piss out of the spiritual pretensions of a pompous, rich and powerful "celebrity".

Yours,
MONA GIGGLER,

Via email.

Out for a duck

Sir,

You refer to Jamie Dalrymple as part of "a proud roster of Durham players" (Ad Nauseam, Eye 1164); in fact he plays for Middlesex, who are also sponsored by Northern Rock.

Yours,
HUGO GYE,

Oxford.

● *Thanks to the many other readers who made the same point. Ed.*

Lookalike

Allen

Elliott

Sir,

Are ITV supremo Charles Allen and Rovers Return supremo Fred Elliott related? I think we should be told – I say I think we should be told.

Regards,
LEE CORNELL,

Via email.

SNP watch

Sir,

Can the crocodile tears emanating from the Scottish National Party (Black Watch Watch, Eye 1164) regarding the latest Iraq deployment of the former Black Watch, be in any way related to that party's stated aim of breaking up the British army and withdrawing "their" new Scotland from NATO? Then again if the regiment no longer exists as part of the British army, none of the troops need worry about deployments in Iraq or anywhere else.

ALEXANDER MCKAY,

Edinburgh.

Cabinet votes

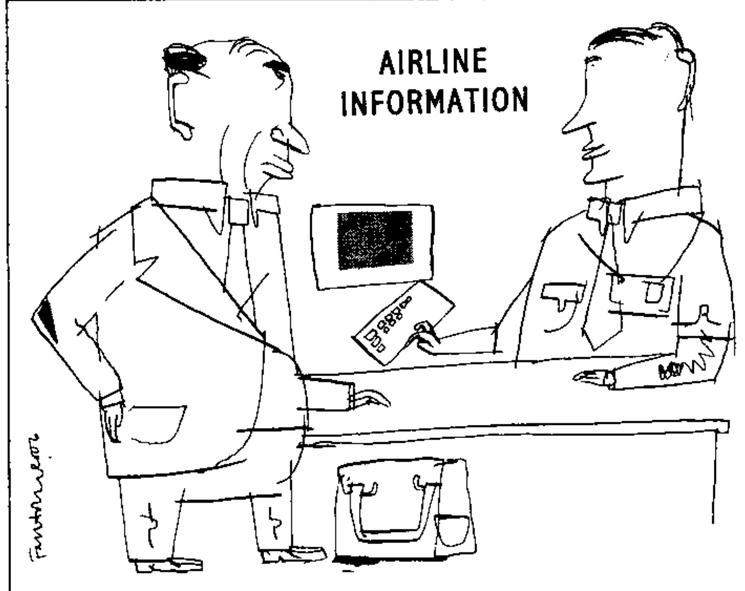
Sir,

James E. King claims that formal votes were never held in cabinet (Letters, 1164). Didn't he listen to Radio 4's dramatisation of the Normanbrook diaries? He'd have heard Churchill accepting defeat in cabinet and actually announcing the voting figures.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT DAVIES,

London.

Scenes You Seldom See



"No problem. You'll be on your way in 20 minutes. Have a nice holiday"

Tate of the nation

Sir,

Piloti fairly questions both the proposed extension to Tate Modern and the DCMS's commitment to supporting English Heritage (Nooks & Corners, Eye 1164). Given the cosy relationship between Tate and the DCMS there would seem to be little hope of arresting the planned madcap extension to Tate Modern. Tate enjoys exempt charity status and is therefore not obliged to submit accounts to the Charity Commission – or even to be identified on its central register of charities. These benefits stem from the gallery's sponsored status. Tate is sponsored by the DCMS. All of Tate's eccentricities may stem from its seemingly untouchable, politically-indulged status – look at how long poor Kim Howells lasted as arts minister when he mocked Turner Prize entrants.

Yours,
MICHAEL DALEY,

Director, ArtWatch UK,
Hertfordshire.

Blazing row

Sir,

Piloti makes some interesting points about the proposed extension to Tate Modern. Many such glass boxes are depicted by architects in their presentations as light, transparent structures when the reality of the completed buildings is vastly different. Many have heavy, prominent structures and are opaque. Cases in point are Foster's Phallus (Swiss Re) and the Giant Scrotum (Ken Livingstone's HQ). Architects now frequently seem to get their buildings photographed at night with all lights blazing, since this is the only way they can achieve their desired "transparency"!

Yours faithfully,
JOE HAYWARD,

Stanmore.

Bee patrol

Sir,

Had Pooh Bear read the rules on importing honey before bringing it back from his trip (cartoon, Eye 1164), he would have known that the limit for personal use is just 1kg and it may only be imported from certain countries. Had he further read the plethora of EU and UK regulations regarding imports over 1kg, he probably wouldn't have bothered in the first place. Incidentally, does anyone know how EU member states stop bees from crossing their borders?

Yours,
PAUL EMBERY,

London.

Pedants of Eight

Sir,

If I may correct two of last issue's pedants in one letter: Henry VIII had three marriages annulled, not two (Alf Tudor has forgotten Anne Boleyn); and the pirate featured in the parrot cartoon was Blackbeard, not Bluebeard, who, whether one takes the name to refer to the historical Gilles de Rais of the fairytale Barbebleue, was never a pirate.

MARCUS PITCAITHLY,

Via email.

Sir,

While it may or may not be that Rosie Winterton (Colour Section, Eye 1164) is a privy counsellor – that is, one who gives advice from a privy – could she also be a privy councillor?

P.D. RALPH,

Ivybridge.

Sir,

The correct military shorthand for the Royal Irish Regiment is "R IRISH". The use of "RIR" (Black Watch Watch, last issue) is the preserve of the paramilitaries, not a reputable organ such as the Eye.

LINDSAY MCKEE RSM Retd,

Via email.

Sir,

Your cartoonist of Modern Nursery Rhymes ("As I was going to St Ives, I saw ten thousand 4-wheel drives", Eye 1163) makes the common mistake of supposing that the subject of this ancient rhyme is St Ives in Cornwall. This was an obscure fishing village that no one had heard of until a few artists started visiting late in the nineteenth century. The real subject of the rhyme, St Ives in Huntingdonshire, has been a famous market town since the Middle Ages, when it held one of the largest annual markets in Europe. When the rhyme originated few people would have been going to the former, whereas many would have been journeying to the latter.

ANDREW BELSEY,

Cardiff.

Sir,

Concerning the Book of Ehud (Eye 1164), it should be pointed out that the miracle at Cana, to which you allude, did not take place at Qana, Lebanon. The most likely location, on etymological grounds, is Ain Kana, close to Nazareth, Israel.

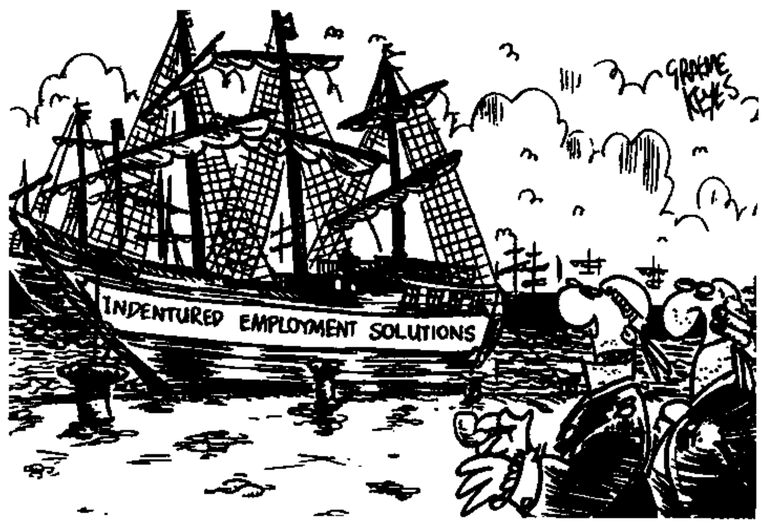
A case of saving the best whine until last?

ULTAN O BROIN,

Dublin.

ANYWAY THIS BLOKE GOES INTO A BAR, YOU KNOW THE SORT, MARRIED, TWO KIDS, PAYING OFF HUGE MORTGAGE, SEX ONCE A WEEK IF HE'S LUCKY ...
RAVE!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HEATH

Stand Up Comic Offends Minorities



"Slavery is such a dirty word"

Secret society

Sir,

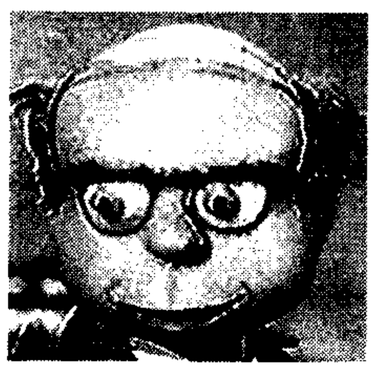
You report in Eye 1164 that city academies are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act (FoI). Shock! Horror! If you view the six pages of exemptions on the FoI website (www.freedomofinformation.co.uk) you will find that among others MI5, MI6, GCHQ, Police Forces, Charities, HM Customs and Excise are all exempt from the act. These organisations alone run into tens of thousands, slightly more than the 50 city academies.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN HIGGS,

Via email.

Lookalike

Beaker



Wheen

Sir,

I was struck by the remarkable similarity between Francis Wheen and Dr Beaker from Supercar. The former is a "News Quiz" stalwart and author of "How Mumbo-jumbo Conquered the World: A Short History of Modern Delusions", the latter is the boffin-scientist behind the Supercar (the marvel of the age, as any fule kno).

Yours sincerely,
JOHN MARDALJEVIC,

Leicestershire.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He'll give you the bird's eye view straight from the horse's mouth"

JOHN McCAULEY, Clyde 2
(Barrie Crawford)

"...any one of two of three men could finish with these, up on the podium this afternoon: Button, Fisichella, Webber, Alonso, Raikkonen"

JAMES ALLEN, ITV
(Eric Hocking)

"I'll cross that chestnut when we get to it"

GEOFFREY BOYCOTT, Radio 5 Live
(John Yeo)

"...looking over his shoulder as to where he might be going next"

JOHN GREGORY, Radio 5 Live
(Kevin Buckley)

"The most important thing about batting is getting the bat to hit the ball"

MICHAEL HOLDING, Sky
(Chris Horner)

SOLUTIONS

INTERNATIONAL

"Path: Immunization Solutions" – *vaccinations* (France)

"Copy Solutions Group" – *photocopiers* (Cambodia)

"Commuting Solutions" – *bicycles* (Ireland)

"Aggregate solutions" – *gravel pit* (USA)

"Growth Solutions" – *cannabis seeds* (Holland)

"Total Music Solutions: Professional Versatile Entertainment" – *wedding band* (Australia)

All submitted by readers

Fruit cake

Sir,

Ok, I accept that it's difficult to keep finding amusing cuttings, but you shouldn't include clippings where the so-called cock-up is surely deliberate on the part of the writer or sub-editor. Latest examples are "Baked Bean Rivals Feel Wind of Change" and "Councillors have pooh-poohed a revamp of the town's public toilets."

You have a lot of form when it comes to this practice. About 30 years ago as a young journalist I subbed a story where a shopkeeper was fined for receiving stolen fruit. My headline "Grocer Sold Bent Bananas" duly got into the pages of your esteemed organ. But I meant it, you swines!

Yes, I've finally got over it. It's amazing what three decades of therapy will do.

Yours,
JOHN CRASKE,

Via email.

On the record

Sir,

A bit naughty of you to slag off the Daily Record over the bogus Army captain story (Eye 1164) since it was the Record that originally exposed war hero "Captain" Alan McIlwraith as a call centre worker. That was a story which all of Fleet Street (the Grauniad included) promptly lifted the next day.

FRANK MORGAN, NUJ FoC

Daily Record.

Rhyme and reason

Sir,

In Eye 1162 Bookworm takes David Mellor to task for referring to a poem about Little Nell, pointing out that Nell was a character from Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop.

True as far as it goes, but there was in fact a poem about Little Nell doing the rounds back in the 50s (possibly prior to then, but that's when I first heard it) which went something like:

"The moon shone on the village pump, it shone on Little Nell,

Was she drawing water? Was she fucking hell.

She was waiting for her lover, the captain of a lugger

Who wasn't fit to shovel shit from one ship to another." And so on.

I waited for the usual bunch of university lecturers, retired physicists, students etc to deluge your letters page pouring scorn on Bookworm for his lack of knowledge of what constitutes really great poetry, but nothing; so for the first time ever I am writing to your esteemed organ!

Yours loyally,
D.J. LEE,

London.

Letter from **Louisiana**

from Our Own Correspondent

AFTER the chaos, renewal. That, at least, was the promise when scenes of Third World incompetence and disarray flooded across TV screens around the world in the wake of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina a year ago.

But in this part of the US, we believe in continuity as much as innovation and cherish our commitment to old-fashioned values like corruption, betrayal and contempt for the little people.

Take the help we have received from the federal government, which has fallen over itself to provide programmes apparently designed to help reconstruction. The recently passed Gulf Opportunity Zone Act is a case in point. The act provides a 50 percent bonus depreciation for new building projects in the designated hurricane-afflicted areas. What this means is that developers get a large tax credit to off-set the cost of their projects. But instead of stimulating genuine post-hurricane reconstruction to benefit devastated poorer neighbourhoods, there is a boom in speculative top-end building projects around Louisiana.

In the small town of Lafayette, which lies between the areas directly impacted by the two hurricanes, an Alabama company intends to build an unneeded 600-plus bed student housing complex. This proposal was strongly resisted by residents, but it was controversially approved after a series of secret meetings between councillors and developers.

Despite the attention from the outside world, this is still Louisiana and politics remains a back room affair. Ours is pretty much the only state where campaign contributions are not subject to ethical oversight on the basis that this would, er, hamper economic development.

Not that our elected representatives are in any way under-employed. Indeed, despite the mess that surrounds us, we can be proud that our state legislature has found time to argue – at some length – the merits of crucial issues of the day, like cockfighting (still legal in Louisiana due to a legal oddity under which chickens are not technically regarded as animals). Ultimately, the proposed ban was defeated on the grounds that to do so would have too negative an impact on the rural economy. Such debates are so much more fun than trying to fix shattered economies, school systems and coastal defences.

The colourful nature of Louisiana politics reaches the heart of our great American democracy. Recently William "Dollar Bill" Jefferson, Democratic congressmen for our state, became the subject of an investigation for allegedly taking bribes in connection with multimillion dollar contracts in West Africa. An FBI raid on Jefferson's New Orleans home netted $90,000 in cash, tucked away in his freezer. He is alleged to have received this money from an FBI informant.

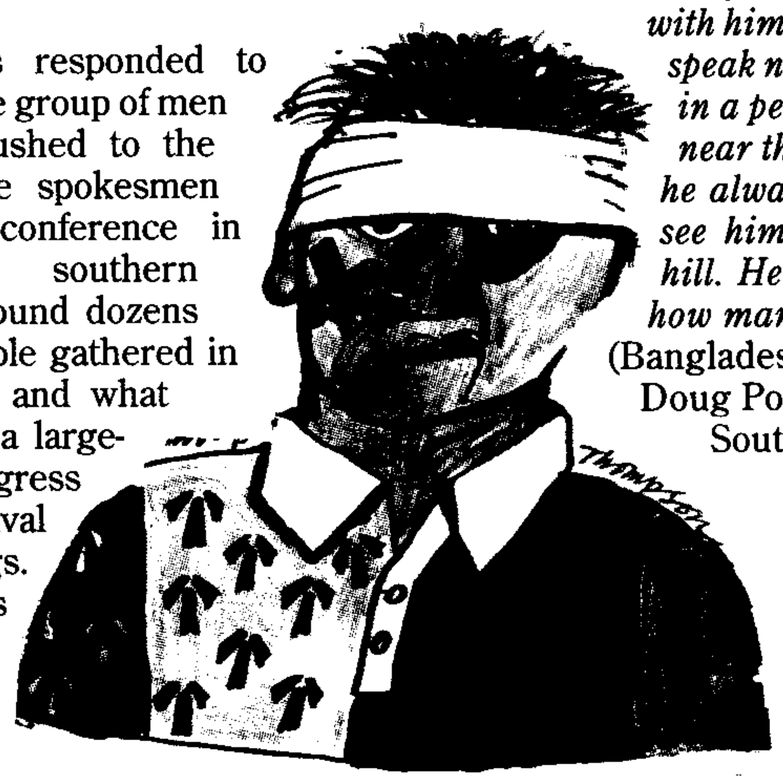
"Dollar Bill" was also heard on a wiretap apparently improperly soliciting funds for his daughter, who is a state legislator. In New Orleans Jefferson is fondly remembered for his display of public service immediately after Katrina, when he had the National Guard help recover possessions from his house.

Jefferson supporters claim he is the victim of a Washington fix to distract attention from the many corruption scandals that envelop leading Republicans ahead of elections this autumn. Sadly, he has enemies closer to home. Our former four-term Democrat governor, Edwin Edwards, currently serving a 10-stretch in a federal institution for racketeering, still has many supporters in the state. They are now arguing that if Jefferson avoids jail, Edwards should be released.

It's the kind of logic that might perplex even some of the congressman's more earthy Nigerian friends, but one that fits in a state where good ol' boys have always ruled and money changing hands has been an accepted part of our politics. How long that remains, with communities still destroyed and people still sleeping in tents, is another matter.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**



● "Our officers responded to reports of a large group of men fighting, and rushed to the scene," a police spokesmen told a press conference in Rostov-on-Don, southern Russia. "They found dozens of cars and people gathered in an empty field, and what appeared to be a large-scale fight in progress between rival criminal gangs. Our officers arrested forty-seven men, and held them all in Rostov jail for several hours, until we finally discovered that they weren't criminals at all. They were two rugby teams, the referee, and some spectators."

An organiser who gave his name only as Alexander later explained that "we weren't doing anything wrong, but rugby is an almost unknown game in this area. We have no regular place to play, so we just gather in a field wherever we can. We were having a scrum when the police arrived, they thought it was a brawl, and they just waded in and arrested everybody. Because we're close to the North Caucasus, the police are always worried about violence and terrorism, and they told us that in future we have to tell them in writing when we want to play rugby, to avoid any more unpleasant incidents. Honestly, it's the first time we've ever heard that you have to tell the local police before you can even throw a ball around." *(St Petersburg Times, 13 June 2006 – spotter: Ray Northcott, 11 Iberian Way, Camberley, Surrey GU15 1LU.)*

– ● –

● *"Marrying a snake may be unusual, but we welcome this union," wedding guests told reporters in the village of Atala, near Bhubaneswar in Orissa state. "We believe it will bring good fortune to the village. It is a shame that the cobra refused to come out of the ant hill where he lives to take part in the ceremony. But the bride looked beautiful in her sari, and the priests used a brass replica snake as a stand in for the groom, so everything is perfectly legal."*

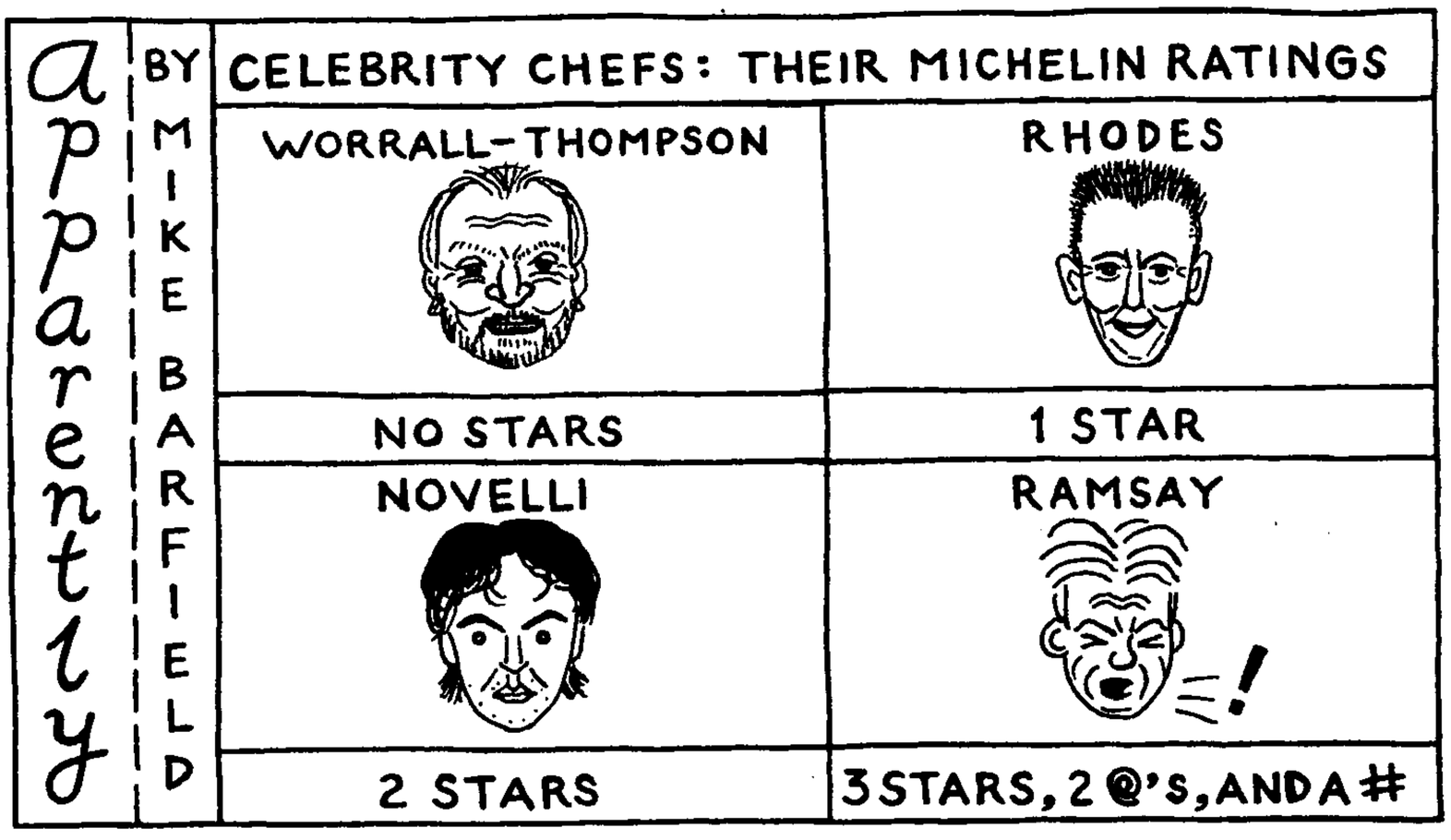
Earlier, Bimbala Das had explained why she was marrying a cobra, at a Hindu ceremony attended by over 2,000 guests. "I fell in love with him last year. Though snakes cannot speak nor understand, we communicate in a peculiar way. Whenever I put milk near the ant hill where the cobra lives, he always comes out to drink. I always see him every time I go near the ant hill. He has never harmed me yet. And how many men can you say that about?" (Bangladesh Star, 3 June 2006 – spotter: Doug Powell, 15 Great Southsea Street, Southsea, PO5 3BY.)

– ● –

● "Cynthia's funeral procession began well," Reuben Lukhele told reporters outside the family house in Alexandra, near Bushbuckridge (South Africa), "and the scene was very moving. The mourners were gathered, the church choir was singing, and we all watched solemnly as the bearers removed her coffin from the hearse. But when the coffin was lifted, the bottom collapsed, and my aunt's body fell onto the pavement for all to see. It completely ruined the dignity of the occasion."

Speaking on behalf of Liberty Funeral Homes, John Mariposa offered an unreserved apology to the family. "It was a great embarrassment. We have never had such an incident before. It was not a cheap coffin, it cost R5,000, but the workmanship was poor quality, and we shall be changing our supplier. At the time, we did what we could. We wiped the dirt from the corpse's clothing, fastened the coffin together again with wires and ropes, and carried on with the procession. However, we are aware that this was not the standard of service that our customers expect."

Express Mafokoane of Phatlalasa Coffin Manufacturers later defended his company's work. "We don't know how our people forgot to put in the screws, but this was the only coffin that was faulty. We have checked the rest of our stock, and they are all fine, so we should not be judged too harshly." *(News 24 (South Africa), 19 June 2006 – spotter: Charl Du Plessis cduplessis@mwanaafrica.com)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)
Acting Incumbent Dr J. Reid Phd (Gorbals)

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT BY MR PRESCOTT

I would like to make it incumbently clear that during the vicar's absence I am the person in charge NOT Mr Reid. Mr Reid is merely

We regret that due to pressures of space it has not been possible to print Mr Prescott's statement in full.

John Reid

The Vicar's message this week has been sent by email from Barbados

Hi to all of you back home! And I want to make one thing clear right from the start – that because I happen to be a long, long way away doesn't mean that I am not right there with you, sharing your fears, hoping your hopes and dreaming your dreams!

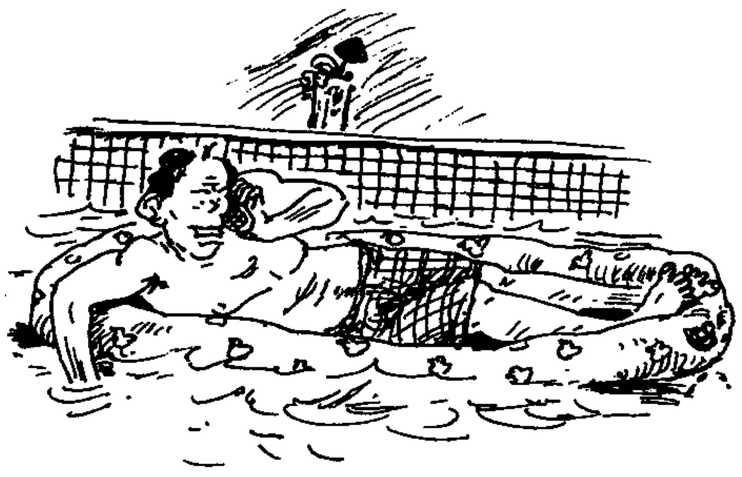
But, most importantly, I am still very much in charge, on a hands-on, day-to-day basis.

The last thing I want to do is to suggest that Mr Prescott isn't doing a first-rate job!

But the truth is that he really isn't doing the job at all!

I mean, I know a lot of you have been a bit concerned about leaving John in change – and I understand that!

After all, someone who sleeps around with his secretary and spends the afternoon playing croquet when he should



The Vicar hard at work, as seen by local artist Mr De La Nougerede

be at work, is hardly the ideal person to be given such a heavy responsibility.

But that's exactly the point. John isn't in charge. I am, as I said earlier.

And remember who it was who said "I am with you always"? It was me! And that's still my message.

So, not only am I recharging my batteries for all the vital parish work that lies ahead, as I sit here by the pool, I am also working 24/7, keeping in minute-by-minute touch with all sorts of important people all over the world, who look to me

for guidance and help in these troubled times!

Take today, for instance. Here is a print-out of everything I have been doing for the parish since I got out of bed at 6.30 to do my exercises (not, I hasten to add, that I need to do exercises, since I am 100 percent fighting fit, as you have to be to do my job, otherwise I might end up looking like poor Mr Clarke, before we sadly had to let him go from running the Neighbourhood Watch)!

6.31 am Put through call to Rev. Dubya for an update on oecumenical matters, such as our joint mission to Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, etc, etc. Message on answering machine as follows: *Greetings in the name of the Lord! You have reached the voicemail of the Rev. Dubya Bush. Kindly leave your message after the bleep.* I leave a message, asking him to ring me back as soon as possible.

6.40 am Breakfast on mango segments and shark fin toast.

8.15 am Put through call to my good friend Bishop Kofi Annan of the First Church of the United Nations in New York. Message: *Bishop Annan is taking no calls at this time, due to pressure of work.*

9.30 am Attempted to track down someone in Lebanon who could brief me on the situation. But unfortunately all lines to that country seem to be out of order.

10 am Tried to call Mr Prescott about something I saw about Heathrow on CNN in my bedroom in the villa. After a very long wait, it was answered by Mrs Potts, who I remembered does the cleaning on Tuesdays at the Working Men's Club. "Oh, hullo, vicar," she said. "I thought you was on holiday." I told her to put Mr Prescott on the phone. "I can't do that," she said. "He's gone down the park to play croquet with his new secretary."

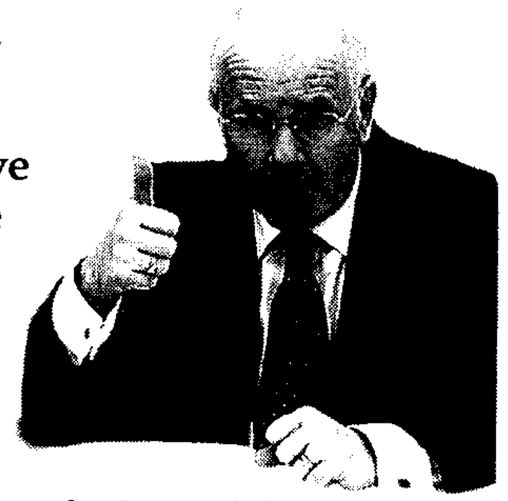
11 am Called the vicarage on the off-chance that someone might be there. The phone was answered by Dr Reid, who told me not to worry and that everything was under control. He was adamant that I did not need to come back from holiday – not that it is a holiday since, as you can see, I am working flat out!

I think this is enough to show how very much I've still got my finger on the pulse when it comes to parish affairs, and I know how much this is appreciated by many of you back home!

With you always,

Tony

Text of the Week with Dr John Reid



This week I've chosen some comforting words from Scripture, which I think will make everyone feel much better:

"Don't panic, Mr Mainwaring" (Book of Jones, 7.3).

My Holiday by Mrs Beckett

Everyone has their own idea of what makes a perfect holiday. Some like to fly off to faraway places and stay in the houses of their rich friends. Others prefer to stay at home to play croquet with their new secretaries! But for me and my husband Leo, the ideal holiday is a homely caravan and a welcoming camp site, somewhere in the French countryside, furnished with all the essentials, such as toilets, shower facilities and a little shop.

For a start, a caravan holiday cuts across class barriers, something our church used to be in favour of! And in these days, when we're all so much aware of the threat to the planet, there's a big difference between our humble caravan and a huge jumbo jet flying to the West Indies, pumping out millions of tons of poisonous gases which will melt the ice caps and drown millions of innocent fish. So take a leaf out of the Beckett book. All you need is a simple 40-foot six-berth mobile home and, of course, a car powerful enough to pull 300 tons, and it's hurrah for the open road!

● *PS. Another advantage of caravanning is that you can easily return from holiday if there is a crisis, rather than being stuck on a yacht, swanning about in silly flowered trunks!*

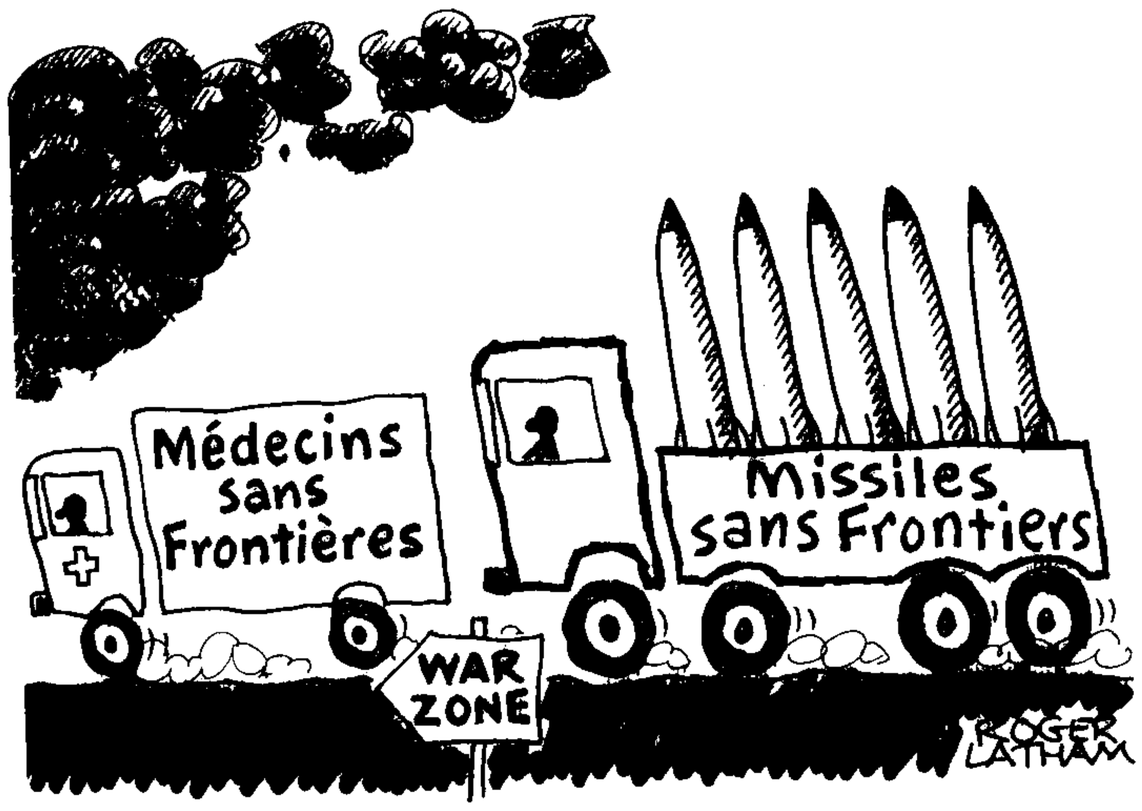
THAT LEBANON AGREEMENT IN FULL

1. The state of Israel and the army of Hezbollah do hereby solemnly agree...

2. ...that we want to carry on killing each other.

3. Er...

4. That's it.



Day 94

ISRAELI ROCKETS 'HIT HEZBOLLAH TARGET'

ISRAELI government officials last night refused to confirm eye-witness reports that two Israeli rockets had actually hit Hezbollah targets in the Southern Lebanese city of Tyre.

"I watched in stunned disbelief as the rockets by-passed the local hospital and the children's nursery and instead slammed directly into a Hezbollah rocket launcher," said one astonished local. "No one could quite believe that we weren't seeing a sickening loss of innocent lives."

Israel promised a full investigation into the incident, but insisted that since the conflict had started only a tiny proportion of their rockets had hit their intended targets.

HEZBOLLAH ROCKETS 'HIT SOMETHING'

HEZBOLLAH officials last night refused to confirm eye-witness reports that a Hezbollah rocket had actually hit something in Israel.

Said a spokesman for the Shi'ite militia, "We're launching hundreds of these things every day, hoping to hit innocent civilians and most of the time we miss completely, so Israel gets all the credit for killing women and children which *(cont. p. 94)*

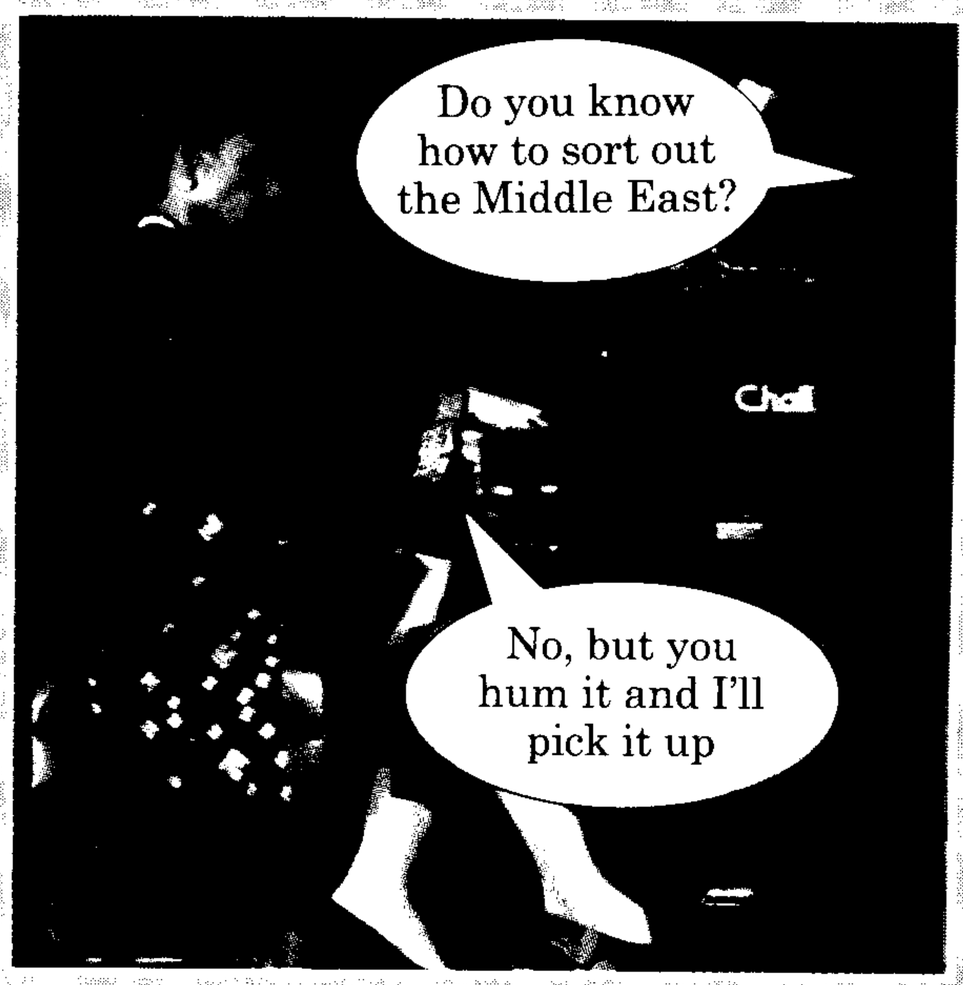
New Words

Ceasefire *(n.)* prolonged and fierce warfare by thousands of troops.

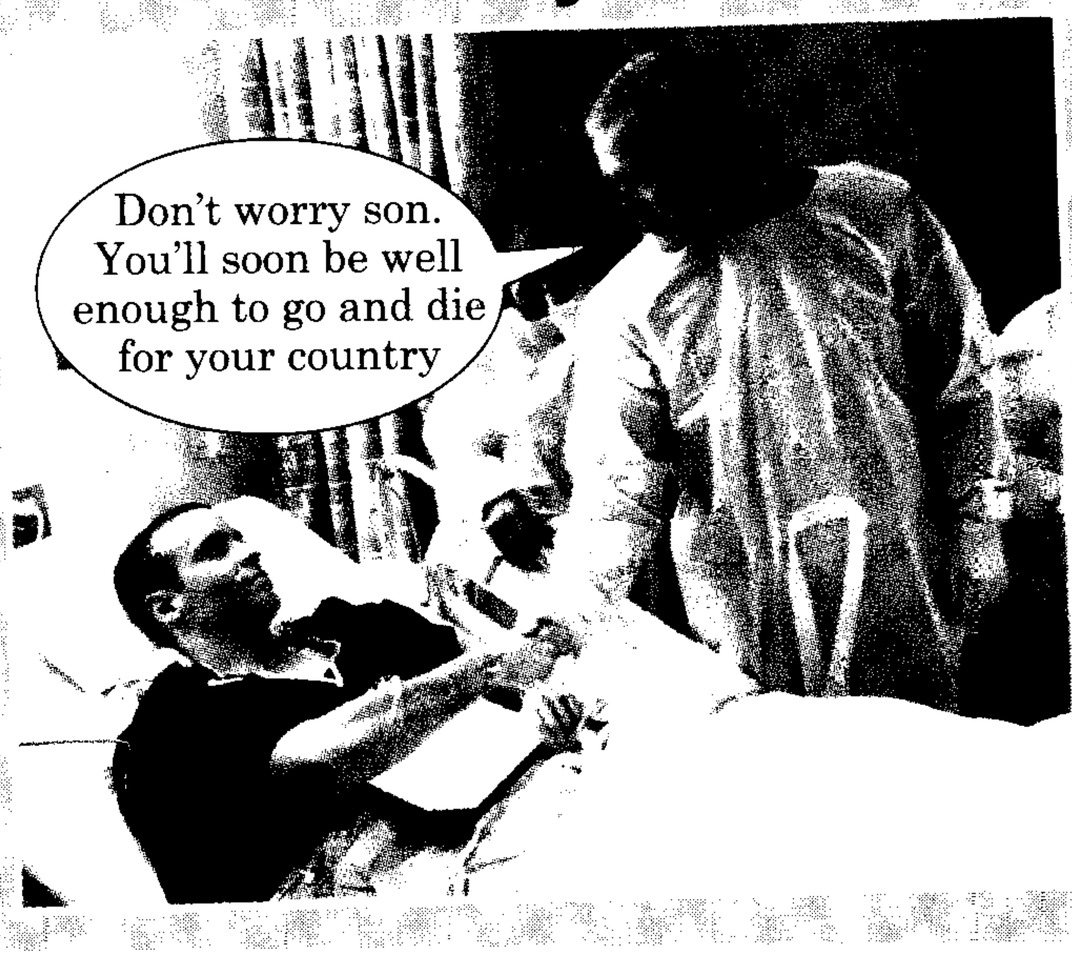
Resolution *(n.)* lack of resolve, eg "There is a new UN Resolution".

Taking the Peace

Old Jokes Revisited



Bush Mercy Mission



HAND LUGGAGE

Those New Guidelines

You will no longer be allowed to take the following items on board the aircraft as hand luggage:

- ☒ Bottle of water
- ☒ Baby's nappy
- ☒ Copy of Da Vinci Code
- ☒ Women's sanitary items
- ☒ Mars bar
- ☒ Trouser press (Corby)
- ☒ Whistling key ring
- ☒ Sellotape dispenser
- ☒ Upright piano
- ☒ Microwave oven
- ☒ Hearing aid
- ☒ Sudoku puzzle
- ☒ Dental floss
- ☒ Islamic terrorist
- ☒ Nuclear bomb

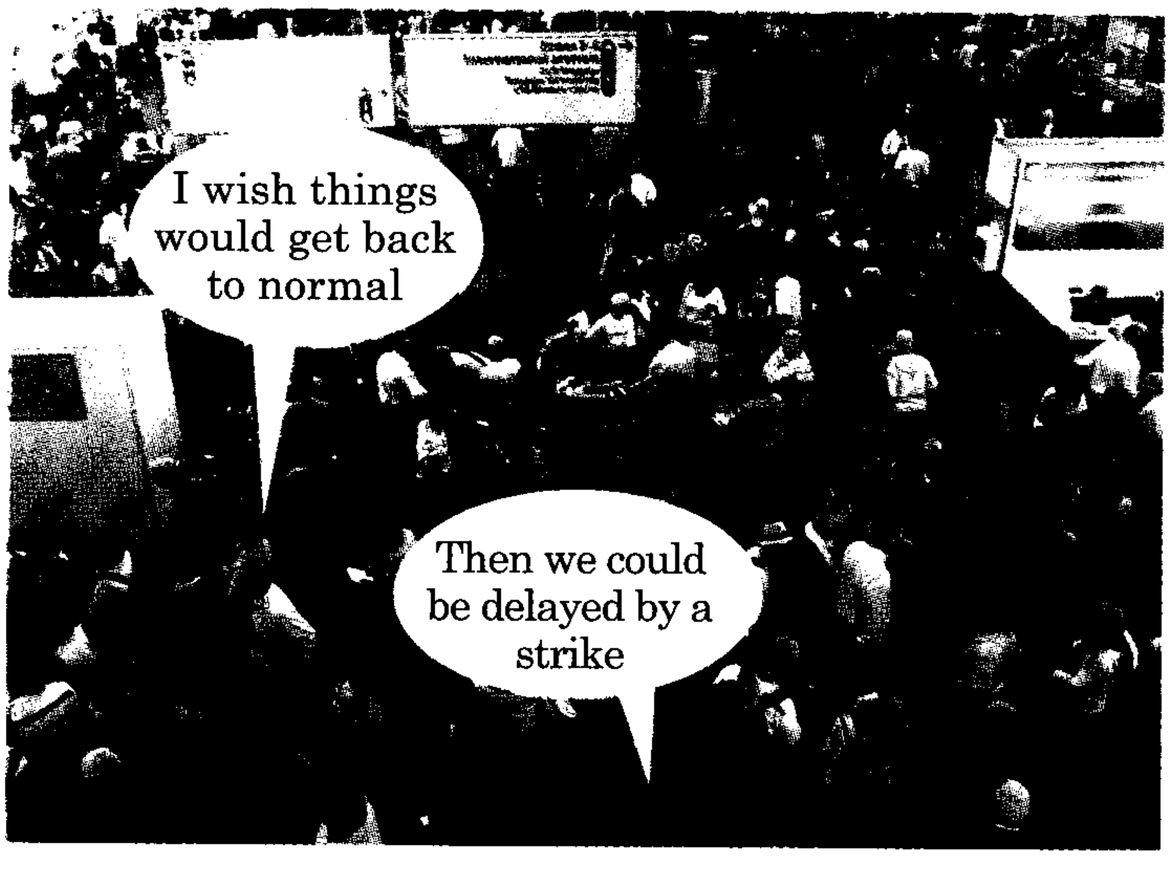
All these items must be placed in the hold.

HOW TO SPOT A HOME-GROWN TERRORIST

Ten Tell-Tale Signs

1. Lovely boy
2. Plays cricket
3. Eats fish and chips
4. Keeps himself to himself
5. Grows long beard
6. Wears robes
7. Does chemistry degree
8. Visits Pakistan for long holiday
9. Very keen on the internet
10. Not very keen on the Jews
11. Turns shed into mosque
12. Obvious nutter

TERROR FLIGHT CHAOS



Exclusive to all tabloids

HALF-SISTER OF TERRORIST SUSPECT IS QUITE FRUITY

by Our Entire Staff **Phil Pageone**

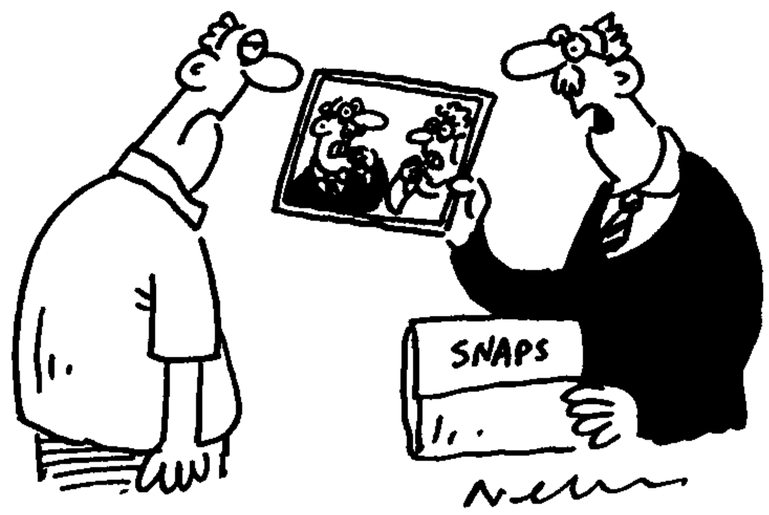
IN A major breakthrough in the investigation into the plot to murder thousands of innocent British civilians, we can exclusively reveal that all the signs are there. In my expert opinion, there is a definite link between fruitiness and the girl in the picture.

A police spokesman from the Anti-Terror Unit added, "Cor! Blimey! Phwoarr! Look at those, Sarge! Someone who is distantly related to one of the suspects is, in fact, quite fruity."

A top terrorism expert from the University of Birmingham said, "I can confirm that she really is quite fruity."

Said a spokesman for the newspaper industry, "This development came just in the nick of time. We were minutes away from printing a picture of a bald man with a beard, but luckily (cont. p. 94)

Full story & more pix: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 94.



"Here's one of us being too scared to go on holiday"

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES NEW SPEED LIMITS

by Our Transport Correspondent **BMW Deedes**

TRANSPORT Minister Alistair Darling is to introduce draconian new speed curbs on Britain's roads, in a bid to cut road deaths.

As from next year, Britain's highways czar plans to reduce the speed limit on all roads to 0 mph.

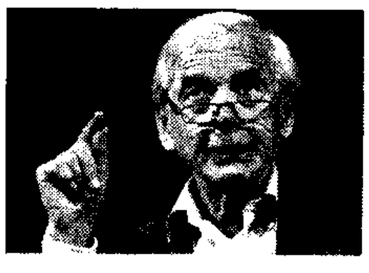
"We are looking for a 100 percent cut in the number of fatal accidents," said Mr Darling last night.

● Full story and pictures **8**

Daily Mail, Friday, August 18, 2006

Would you believe it!?

John Humphrys writes about how pieces by John Humphrys complaining about Christmas getting earlier are getting earlier.



IT'S only August and yet already the first grumbling rant about the appearance of Christmas decorations in the shops has been published in the Daily Mail, as *(cont. p94)*

A Taxi Driver writes

EVERY week a well-known cab driver is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week: **Polly Toynbee** (Cab No. 2468).

Blimey, guv, these immigrants flooding into Britain from every corner of the globe. Don't get me wrong. I'm no racist. I've got nothing against foreigners coming over here and taking our jobs. Good luck to them, I say. But let's face it, this is only a tiny island when you come to look at it. I mean all these what they call "Eastern Europeans" – Poles, Latvians, and now the government, are giving the green light to millions of Bulgarians. I mean take this traffic jam we're sitting in it's solid all the way up to Marble Arch. I guarantee that at least half come from overseas. Oi, you lot, get off the bloody road! Whoever's to blame for it should be strung up. I had that Enoch Powell in the back of my cab many years ago. Very clever man.

Next week: Jim Sheridan MSP writes in praise of the jury system.

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The Pulse

MING RESTORATION 'A TRIUMPH'

by Our Political Staff **Keith Vase**

A PRICELESS Ming party leader who was recently smashed into "ten thousand pieces" after winning the Lib Dem leadership election, has been painstakingly reassembled and put back on show in the House of Commons.

Said a party spokesman last night, "It is an amazing feat of the restorer's art. If you look closely, you can see the Ming is still hopelessly cracked, but from a distance one would almost think that he was as good as new (or rather old)."

Ming Campbell is 106.

Late News

KENNEDY DRIES UP IN DROUGHT

THE once fast-flowing Kennedy has been reduced to no more than a tiny trickle.

Where once vast volumes of liquid roared continuously down its throat, to the delight of journalists, nothing can now be seen but a parched and cracked throat.

"This is a sad day for all of us," said one Lib Dem MP last night. "We can only hope that one day soon we shall see the Kennedy once again brimming over, and ready to replace this hopeless old Chinaman that we made such a mistake by electing leader."

Charles Kennedy is 25.

BBC DIVERSITY CZAR ATTACKS HERSELF

by Our Media Staff **Polly Tickly-Correct**

THE BBC Diversity Supremo, Mary Fitzpatrick, last night lashed out at herself for her statements about "white BBC reporters".

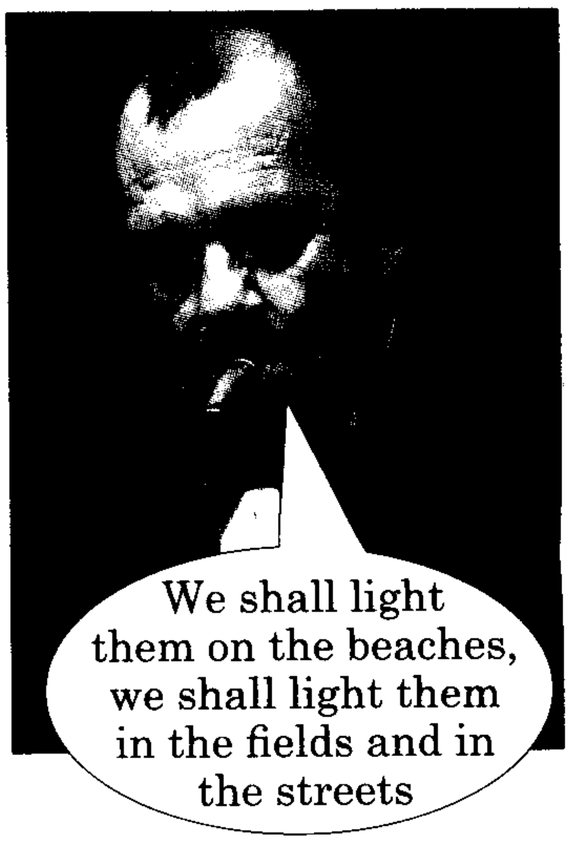
She said, "How can I possibly comment on these white people when I come from a different ethnic background from them?"

Hideously White City

She continued, "I obviously lack credibility and my remarks cannot possibly be culturally accurate.

"I should be replaced at once," she concluded, "before I say anything else really stupid and destroy the reputation of the BBC once and for all."

MEL SMITH'S HEROIC STAND



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ken Richmond, cinematic icon

So. Farewell then
Ken Richmond.

You were famous
For banging
The gong
At the beginning of
J. Arthur Rank films.

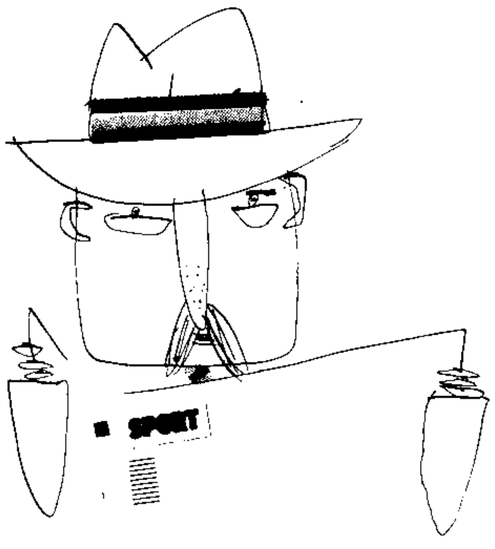
"Bong!"
That was your catchphrase.

Now it is more
A case of
Going, going,
Gong!

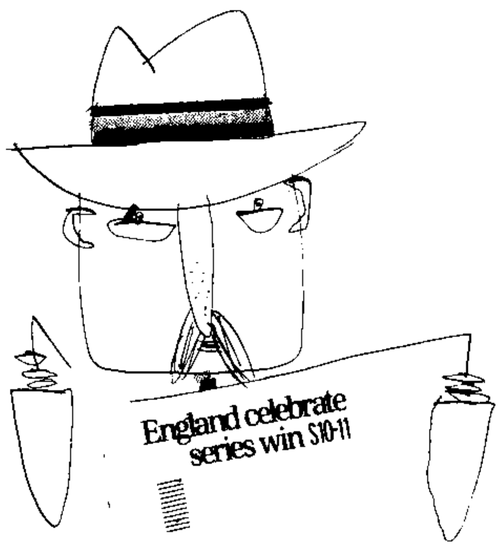
J. Arthur Thribb (17½)

CHATTO

"Far too many of these Asian fellows coming here, to my mind...



"Still, if they're all like that chap Mahmood and the little Johnny with the turban...



"... we can't have enough of them

BECKHAM
A Nation Mourns

by Our Football Staff **Jimmy Grieves**

THE GOVERNMENT is to declare a national day of mourning, following the announcement that David Beckham has been dropped from the England squad.

There will be a memorial service at Westminster Abbey to mark the death of David Beckham's career.

The Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, is expected to officiate at the service for the man he calls simply "The People's Player".

Sir Elton John will be performing a new version of his much-loved funerary anthem, *Candle In The Goal.*

The service will be sponsored by Gillette – the greatest shave a man can get. *(That's enough Beckham. Ed.)*

Late News – Fayed accuses Prince Philip of murdering David Beckham

"These 'friendlies' really are a waste of time"

Gina Ford's 'The Contented Baby' Expert Book

It's vital that you stick rigorously to this daily routine to avoid unnecessary tantrums.

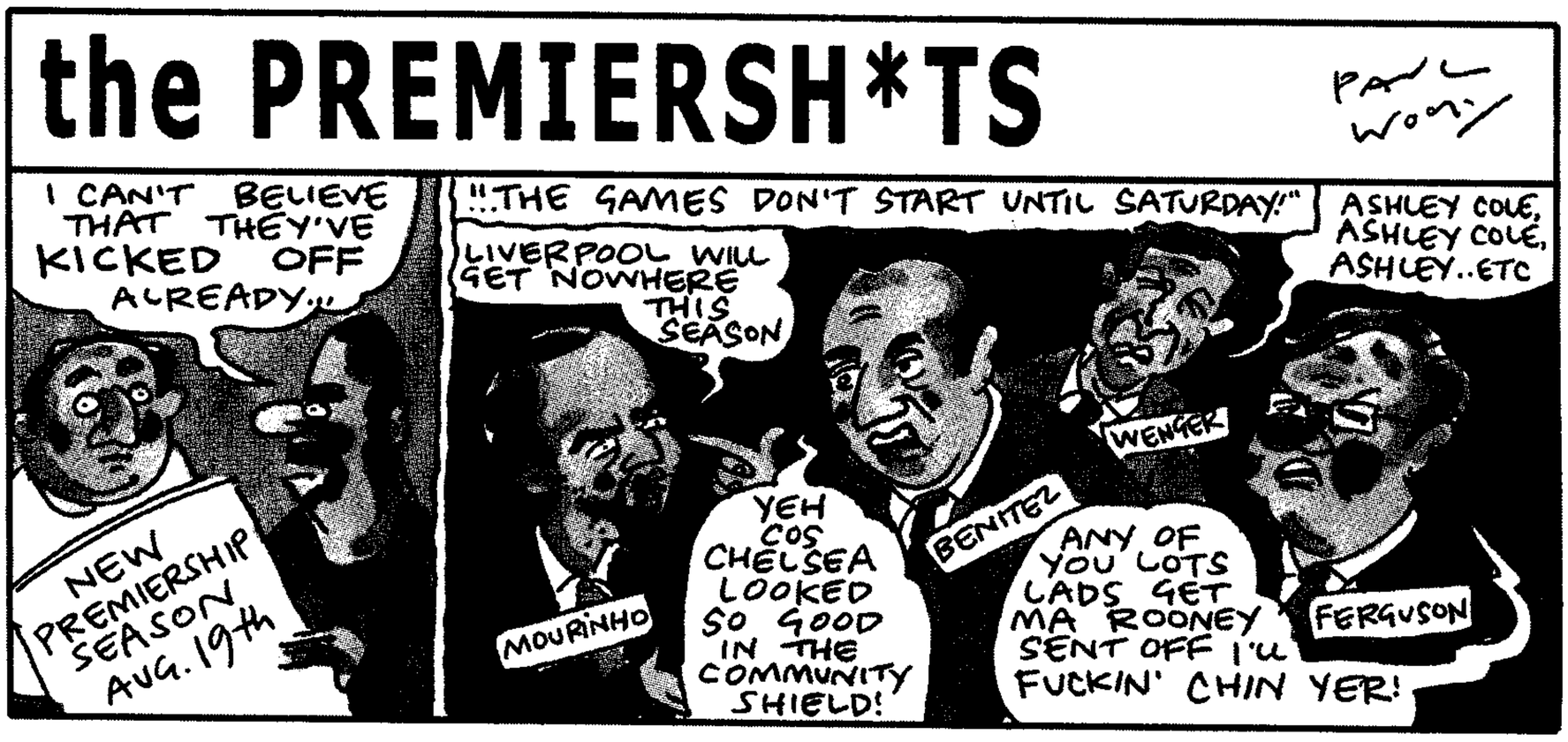
8.00 am	Wake up. Immediately log on to 'mumset.com' to read derogatory comments from mums about your child-rearing techniques. Allow yourself at least an hour of controlled crying.
9.00 am	Phone your high-price lawyers. Threaten to hold your breath until your face turns blue unless they do what you want.
9.30 am	High price lawyers slam injunction on web-site.
10.00 am	Morning nap.
12.00 pm	Lunch
3.00 pm	Log back on to website. Discover that not all derogatory posts have been removed. Stomp your feet, throw yourself on the floor and refuse to get up until someone has been sued.
4.00 pm	Further hour of controlled crying.
5.00 pm	Dinner, bath and bed.

Big Brother Rip-off!!!!

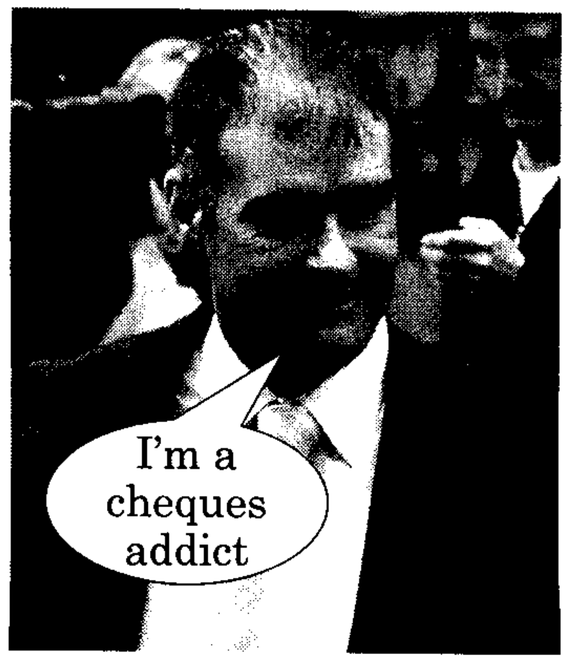
Big Brother bosses are thinking of putting contestants back in the house after they've ALREADY BEEN VOTED OUT – making the viewers' expensive phone VOTES COMPLETELY POINTLESS! Do they really think viewers are so stupid? You tell us!*

I think it's a swizz	0900 379 771
I think it's a con	0900 379 772
I'm not falling for that again	0900 379 773
There's no way I'm inflating my phone bill by calling premium rate numbers to take part in a pointless and futile exercise	0900 379 774

*Calls cost twenty quid a minute unless we feel like charging you anything different. Always ask the phone bill payer before making the call, as the look on his/her face can be quite funny.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THEY'VE KICKED OFF ALREADY...
NEW PREMIERSHIP SEASON AUG. 19th
!!..THE GAMES DON'T START UNTIL SATURDAY!"
LIVERPOOL WILL GET NOWHERE THIS SEASON
MOURINHO
YEH COS CHELSEA LOOKED SO GOOD IN THE COMMUNITY SHIELD!
BENITEZ
WENGER
ANY OF YOU LOTS LADS GET MA ROONEY SENT OFF I'LL FUCKIN' CHIN YER!
FERGUSON
ASHLEY COLE, ASHLEY COLE, ASHLEY..ETC

TOMMY SHERIDAN LIBEL VICTORY



An Eye Exclusive

HOW I WOULD SOLVE ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS

by Tory leader **David Cameron**

PEOPLE keep asking me what I would do about the war in the Middle East.

Well, I've got one simple answer. We could start by saving water when we brush our teeth.

The only thing which matters in the world today is that we save the planet for future generations.

And it's up to each and every one of us to make a contribution.

Do you realise, for example. that if everyone in the country turned off their television sets at night, we would save enough electricity to light a city the size of Birmingham?

Just think about it.

And here's another thought. If all businesses provided bedrooms for their staff, then no one would need to go home at night.

Not only would this produce a massive saving in the cars and trains which would no longer be needed to get people to and from work.

If people weren't at home in the evenings, they wouldn't need to turn on their television sets at all – thus saving enough electricity to light and heat a country the size of Africa!

So there you are.

Let's make a start today in building the world of tomorrow!

© *David Cameron 2006.*

Eye Summer Quiz

CONSERVATIVE

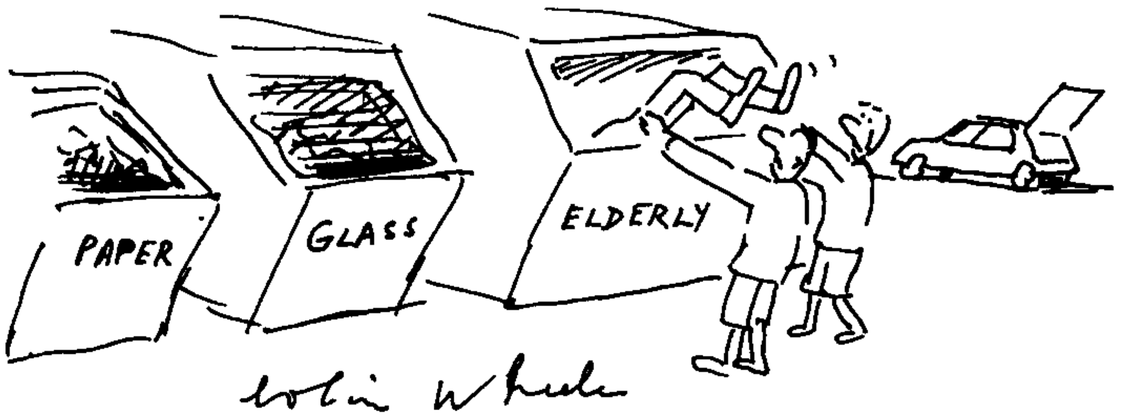
Our picture is of the new logo of the Conservative Party. But what does it represent? Is it:

A. A floral hat as worn by Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, at this year's Royal Ascot race meeting?

B. A controlled nuclear explosion at the Khomeini testing range in Iran?

C. A burst water main in Sutton High Street which Thames Water has not repaired in 15 years?

Get the right answer and you could be the Tory candidate for Mayor of London.



POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

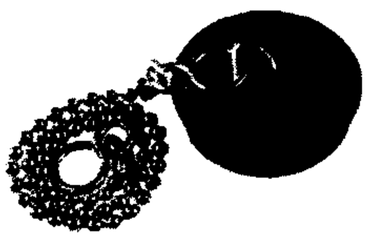
08.15 am A 999 call was received from a group of youths engaged in housebreaking at the Tessa Sanderson sheltered housing complex in Bob Marley Crescent. An armed response unit was despatched to the premises where they reported that a 91-year-old white female, Mrs Agnes Piltdown, had verbally abused the youths. In self-defence they had been forced to break Piltdown's legs. She was duly arrested and cautioned by PC Kennington for a breach of the peace. She was then taken into custody and after a 3-hour interview she entered into a coma situation from which, sadly, she did not recover.

09.30 am Working breakfast in station canteen to discuss the rising crime rate among senior citizens. A CCTV sequence was shown of two pensioners who had been recorded illegally swimming at the Neasden Park Lido in Somerfield Road without the presence of a Risk Assessment Supervisor as required under Section 8 of the EC's new Public Swimming (Health and Safety) Regulations. The film also showed the intervention of two officers trained in underwater surveillance, PCs Morden and Kilburn, who cautioned the couple. A useful discussion ensued regarding the quality of the eggs, bacon, mushrooms and hash browns supplied to officers during the showing of the footage.

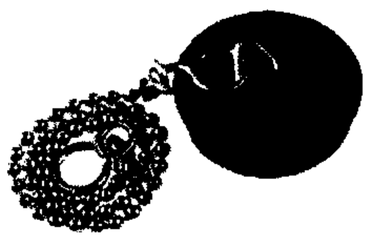
15.48 pm Call received from a member of the public who was witnessing a serious domestic incident involving an elderly male and a one-legged female taking place in Waitrose Avenue. When officers arrived at the scene they identified the couple as a Sir Paul McCartney and his good lady. When questioned, Lady Macca explained that her husband had locked her out of the couple's residence and changed the locks, thus denying her ingress. The officers, WPC Hainault and Community Support officer Acton, obtained the signatures of Sir Paul and his wife, which they were later able to offer for sale on e-Bay at a reserve price of £30,000.

19.00 pm Following intelligence reports from top-level Pakistani restaurant owner, Mohammed Balti, every available officer was placed on Super Cobra Double Red Terror Alert. Officers were then redeployed for a mass raid on the Fatima Whitbread Housing Estate in High Barnet as part of Operation Arrest Everyone (to be continued)

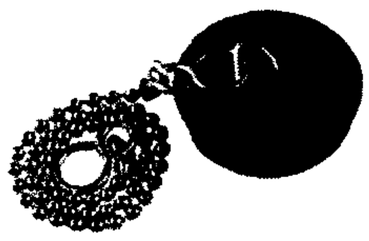
Eye 10 Best Buys



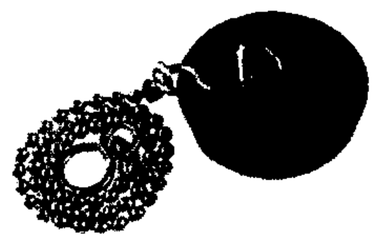
1. 'The Pluggo' from Asda. Basic 'fit for purpose' plug. Iconic design. Fits any bath. Made in Vietnam. 22p. ***Best Economy Buy.***



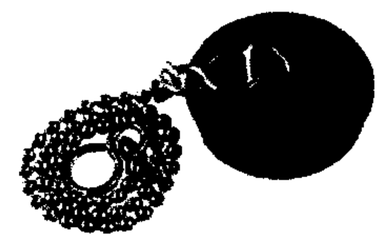
2. 'The Chatsworth' from the Gloucestershire Bath Co., Cirencester. Exact replica of plug designed for the 4th Duke of Devonshire by Sir Joseph Paxton. £978.99. ***Best Luxury Buy.***



3. 'The Planet Saver' from Body Shop. These eco-friendly, biodegradable plugs are specially designed to dissolve in water. £25 for packet of 100. ***Best Organic Buy.***



4. 'De Pløgge' Ikea have entered the bath-plug market with an exciting range of plugs in many colours that you can assemble yourself. From all Ikea branches. £9.99. ***Best Bargain Buy.***

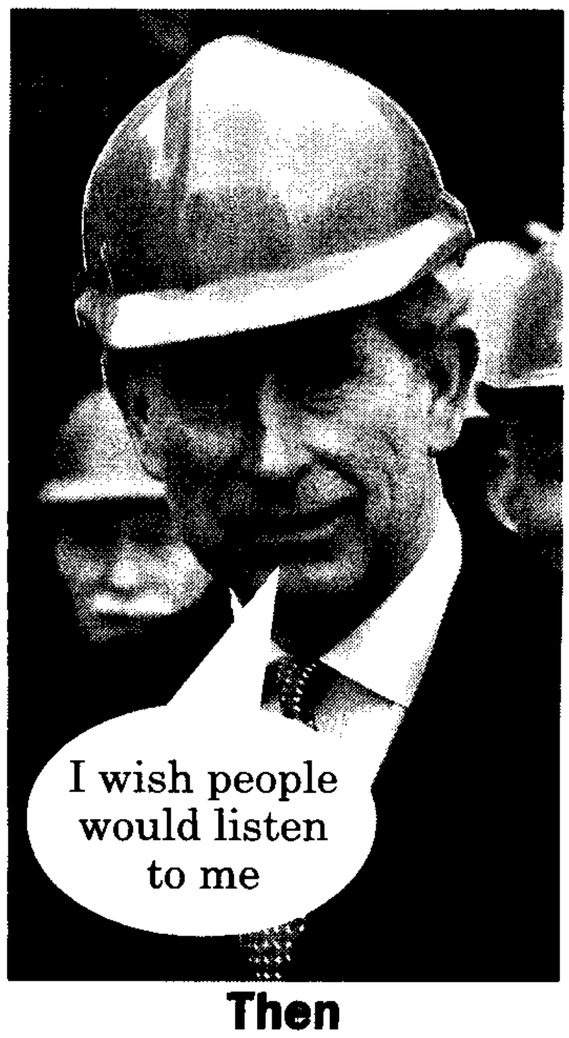


5. 'The Poseidon XP-15.' Specially designed by NASA scientists for use in the space shuttle – is made from titanium and will last for 10 million years. £2 million. ***Best Value for Money.*** *(That's enough plugs. Ed.)*

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

PRINCESS DIANA	HEATHER MILLS
● Statuesque blonde hounded by tabloids	● Statuesque blonde hounded by tabloids
● Campaigned against landmines	● Campaigned against landmines
● Represented by Anthony Julius in messy divorce	● Represented by Anthony Julius in messy divorce
● Married Charlie	● Married right Charlie

PRINCE CHARLES BUGGING LATEST



Then

Now

BETJEMAN AT 100

New Poem Discovered

The flags are flying in the sun,
A happy day for everyone!
Special programmes on the telly,
Introduced by old George Melly.
Gosh! I say, it does sound fun!

Everywhere a celebration,
Specially here on Wantage station.
Bunting flying from the shops,
Kiddies munching lollipops.
A cheer goes up thoughout the nation.

What's the reason for the party,
Why is everyone so hearty?
All because I've made my ton,
Me and dear Joan Hunter-Dunn!
I think I'll have another smarty!

(Not very good, is it? But put it in if you like. J.B.)

A podcast of this poem, read by Alan Bennett, can be downloaded from www.bbcbetjfest.co.uk

DIARY

MARCO PIERRE WHITE

I'm hard, me. OK, I'll cook you the perfect apricot and kidney blancmange with kiwi-fruitcoulis, but if I catch you staring at me, matey, you'll feel my fucking fist up your backside.

I came from a hard, working-class family with traditional values. My dad used to arm-wrestle the whippet before going down mines; if one of the racing-pigeons got lippy, we'd toss him in the pot and have him with diced carrots for tea.

I once had that Princess Margaret in my restaurant. This was the 1980s. It was like riding on a fantastic rollercoaster with a bowl of tomato soup sploshing all over the fucking place.

It immediately became apparent that the Princess wasn't my kind of person, all lah-di-dah and what-have-you. You could tell just from the look of her that she'd never worked a day behind the cash-till in Rumbelows.

But the moment I finally snapped was when she asked one of my underlings for some salt on her Introverted Sea Bass Covered with Baby Goose Saliva in a Rhododendron Sauce. I flew out the kitchen and challenged her to come outside and say it to my face. When she mumbled something about only having asked for the salt, I flipped.

The lady deserved a pummelling, but I let her off lightly. I picked her up by the scruff of the neck, marched her into the kitchen, and hung her by her frilly lace collar to a meat-hook. "That's the last time you'll ever ask one of my staff for the fucking salt – bitch!" I told her, in no uncertain terms. Let me tell you, the lady learned respect. She never asked for salt in my presence again.

The Princess and me became firm friends, until I heard on the grapevine that she'd dissed me to a mutual friend, complaining I could be a bit unpleasant at times. The one thing I can't take is disloyalty. I never spoke to the woman again.

They all came to my restaurant in the Eighties, all the celebrities, and not just any old celebrities: former Bond Girl Fiona Fullerton, top pop duet Bros, former glove puppet Basil Brush. It was the place to see and be seen.

A lot of these famous names became very special people in my life. Gerald Harper. Fergie. Jason Donovan. The thin one off Casualty. Vanessa Feltz. The lot.

Michael Winner became a firm friend. I cooked a five course meal for him at the unveiling of the plaque for top dead celebrity policewoman WPC Yvonne Fletcher, and he came back for seconds, with an extra dollop of jelly.

Michael regularly ate at my restaurant in the Eighties. He appreciated the way I would always make sure two of my staff came to the table with his own monogrammed potty, and then wipe his bottom afterwards, saving him the bother of a trip to the toilet.

With fame came sex and encounters with female customers in the ladies loos and under the tables while their husbands were finishing off their Languoustine Tagliatelle with Banana Yoghurt en Croute. The Eighties was that kind of era.

I was briefly married to a Spice Girl, I forget which. On our honeymoon she started to sing "Tell you what I want what I really really want". I told her to shut the fuck up and she left me.

I think I am within my rights to give my opinion of Delia Smith. I frankly never liked the look of her and I never fell for her whole goody-two-shoes image. Once she had the nerve to come into my restaurant with a view to eating a meal. I thought I'd give her a taste of her own medicine. I challenged her to an arm-wrestling contest but she refused, so I got her in a half-nelson and told my staff to take her outside and give her a good pummeling. I never fancied her anyway.

My trouble is I've always been over-sensitive, like Francis of Assisi. If someone tells me that my souffle is maybe just a little too lemony for their taste, my feelings will be hurt, so I'll grab them by the collar and slit their trousers with a carving knife.

Friends tell me I am very, very insecure, and far too thoughtful, which sometimes leads me to jab my finger in the eyes of insensitive underlings. You see, I want them to love me.

Psychologically, I am a perfectionist. If anything goes wrong, I'll feel compelled to surgically castrate the underling with a grapefruit spoon and a corkscrew. It's the only way he'll ever realise it was all his fault. He should have realised I was a perfectionist. He should never have asked if he could open a window and let in some air just as I was putting the finishing touches to a sprig of mint on the Pig's Bladder Stuffed with Smoked Salmon served with Raspberry and Caramel Dumplings on a Sparrow-Kidney Coulis.

By the Spring of 1992, I had already had three Michelin stars and three wives and I was looking for fresh challenges. So I opened a new restaurant, The Slaughterhouse, on London's trendy Fulham Road.

The Eighties had by now given way to the Nineties, and the world was in search of a whole new concept in luxury dining. Nouvelle Cuisine, with its fancy concoctions, was over, fuck it, and a more earthy, realistic approach had taken its place. I was the Leeds chef, hot-headed and driven and not giving a flying fuck about anyone as I roller-coastered to another star, another wife.

Diners were prepared to pay upwards of £100 a head to eat their meat not just rare but raw, and not just raw, but straight off the bone of the still-breathing animal. We would deliver a live baby lamb to the table, a sous-chef would shear it, and then two underlings would wrestle it to the plate while a waiter came over to pour my special Asparagus and Dandelion Sauce over it. I would then stuff a silken handkerchief soaked in foie-gras and brandy into its mouth, to prevent it from fucking bleating, then the diner would sink his teeth into the leg of the baby lamb. And then I'd cry real tears, because that poor little lamb's leg would suddenly remind me of my ex-wife's. Y'see, I'm hard, me - but sensitive with it.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

ALONZO, I WANT MY HAIR LIKE THIS
IT'S A GREAT STYLE. IT'S VERY NOW. BUT I'M NOT SURE IT'S YOU.
VOGUE
IT MIGHT MAKE YOUR NOSE APPEAR MORE PROMINENT AND YOUR FACE LOOK A BIT NARROW...
PROMINENT? NARROW-FACED?!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME, ALONZO?
ONLY THAT IF YOU REALLY WANT THIS SEASON'S HAIRSTYLE...
YOU'LL NEED A SHORTER NOSE...
FINE...
AND BIGGER CHEEKBONES...
NO PROBLEM. BOOK ME IN.
COSMETIC SURGEON
RECEPTION

Literary Review

Rabbit stew

Terrorist
John Updike
(Hamish Hamilton, £17.99)

FANS of Updike's fiction will be reassured to know that, while his latest novel marks something of a departure in subject matter, the same old obsessions with sex and bodily functions are still present and incorrect. But along with the more traditional misogyny there's an exotic new flavour of racial stereotyping.

It was, perhaps, a brave decision for a septuagenarian scribbler with an existing oeuvre concerned so largely with small town adultery, to try to imagine what might motivate a young Muslim growing up in New Jersey to become a suicide bomber.

The problem is that Ahmad is not so much a character as a didactic puppet, constantly spouting bits of the Koran just to remind you of his alien, and alienated, nature. He may have formed his own views of the world about him, or they may have been formed by his imam, Shaikh Rashid, but in either case the misanthropy and self-disgust are expressed in the same lofty convoluted authorial style as the supposedly non-partisan passages of prose. So who's really talking?

If Ahmad's credibility is in doubt, the portrayal of other characters, notably the women in the book, is still more suspect. Ahmad's mother, Teresa, is a flame-haired Irish Catholic, who was briefly married to Ahmad's father, Omar, before he ran off back to Egypt. We get to know her largely through the eyes of Jack Levy, Ahmad's school counsellor, a Jew with lashings of liberal guilt but no religious faith, whose pastoral care for his pupil takes the form of having an affair with the boy's mother. She is as needy emotionally as Jack is sexually: in his case because his Lutheran wife, Beth, is "oppressively fat".

Beth's sister Hermione just happens to work for the Secretary for Homeland Security in Washington DC, where her job title is Undersecretary for Women's Purses: she's in charge of handbag searches, apparently. Is it her boss who is being patronising here, or is it really the author? Certainly her only function in the narrative is to provide the missing link in a chain of connection by which the climax foreshadowed in the book's title is, anticlimactically, forestalled.

The real triumph of female characterisation must be Ahmad's fellow pupil Joryleen. She starts off as a big-hearted, big-breasted, black gospel chorister who cheerfully invites Ahmad to her church. Yet the minute she leaves school, she abandons her lilting songs for Jesus and turns to prostitution to support her pimp boyfriend, the hilariously named Tylenol Jones, formerly the school bully and football star, whose face is "the color of walnut furniture stain". Phew, what a deft bit of artistic economy, cramming all that dismal "person of colour" prejudice into two handy caricatures!

The male characterisation is not much better than the female. Apart from sneaky Jack and gangster Tylenol, there's that sinister imam, a hook-nosed Arab (from Yemen), "slight and slim as a dagger", who persuades his only pupil ("how I envy you, dear boy") that by stubbing himself out like someone's else cigarette he will secure a speedy transfer to a Paradise full of dark-eyed virgins (unlike the dark-skinned non-virgin Joryleen, with her "moist inner membranes", who so sorely tempts him in this world).

Then there are the Chehab brothers, from Lebanon, who run the trucking firm where Ahmad gets a job (through the imam's influence) and who cheerily extol the virtues of living in New Jersey while voicing their admiration for Osama bin Laden and his destruction of the twin towers. Way to go! And finally, to complete the religious spectrum, there's that WASP government man in Washington, full of constipated "Pennsylvania piety".

A certain Buchanesque want of subtlety in the characterisation might not matter if *Terrorist* really were the thriller its title passes it off as. Unfortunately that would require something in the way of a plot. But the only plot in *Terrorist* is the one which is all too conveniently foiled by reason of the fact that between the deathwish teenager with the truck full of explosives heading for the New Jersey tunnel in the rush-hour, and the un-named Secretary for Homeland Security in Washington, there are just four degrees of separation (assistant: sister: husband: pupil).

In other words, it's all too pat. So what, in the end, was the point? Well, 9/11 required to be addressed and now Updike has added his pennyworth to a pile already containing the dubious offerings of J McInerny and J Safran Foer. And by coming at it from the other direction he may have hoped to steal a politically correct march on those more victim-centred rivals. Chunks of quoted scripture attest to his researches into "their" point of view, but it is hard to imagine anyone seriously reading this book from a Muslim perspective. Did he hope to exert some influence? There's some clunky stuff about how the Koran isn't all about death to the infidel, there are passages of peace and love too, you know. And jihad really means spiritual striving, not war. A nod to tolerance, then? Music to deaf ears, I fear.

Books & Bookmen

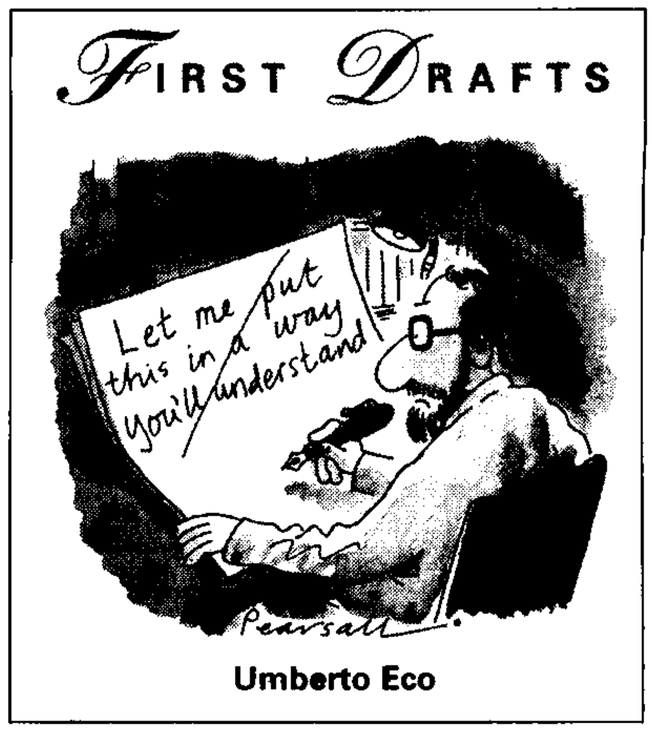
■ WITH the HMV share price running at £1 down on this time last year, it is good to see Waterstone's spending shareholders' money wisely.

It is about to launch an exciting new strapline, something the marketing luvvies at Brentford feel will help turn around flagging sales. This will be their third such motto in five years, following hot on the heels of "The Last Word In Books" and the equally dull "For The Love Of Books", neither of which made any impact on customers and ended up embarrassing all concerned.

So what are these inspiring new words that will set the tills ringing and strike fear into Smiths and Tesco? "What's Your Story?", apparently. The new strapline will feature in press ads and branches in the run up to Christmas and has already met with resounding ambivalence from many in-house staff who secretly refer to it as "What's The Point?"

■ ONE of the most frequently asked questions in the publishing world at the moment is: "Will the Rupert Everett book sell?"

Little Brown has reportedly paid £1m for the C-list actor's memoirs,



a figure which has stunned publishers and retailers alike.

The same company paid £1.4m for *Two Lives* by Vikram Seth, a book that barely sold 10,000 copies last Christmas, according to the official industry sales figures, leading many to view it as *the* turkey of 2005. It may well be time for Little Brown to get the Paxo ready again.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ SQUAT machines and shoulder presses are the latest wheeze in the "anything but books" approach to stocking public libraries.

Liverpool's Central Library is attempting to beef up its bookworms and has invested £12,000 in five "muscle toning" stations to be installed next to the computing area and used by people queuing for internet access.

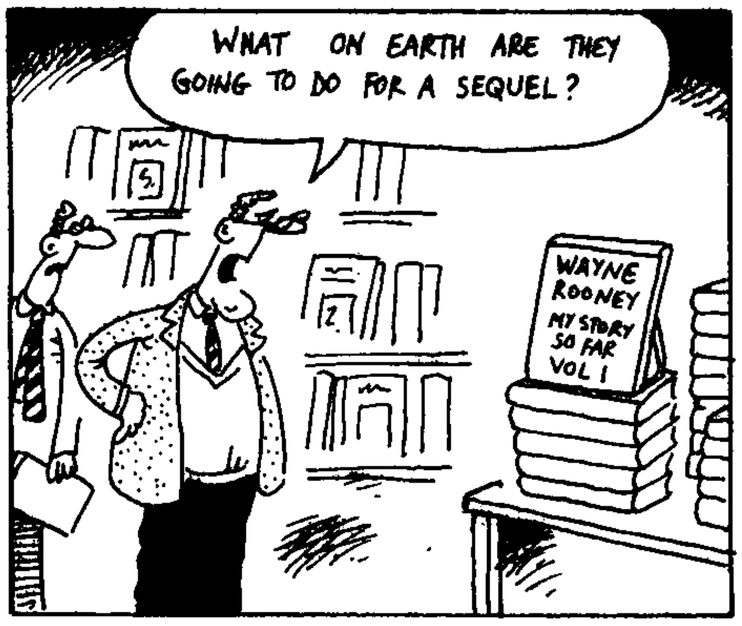
Leisure chiefs at least acknowledge that cardiovascular machines such as treadmills would be too noisy, while these machines will, apparently, be "discreet". Fitness instructors from local leisure centres will be on hand to demonstrate the equipment and "no special clothing is required". The city plans to roll-out the idea into branch libraries next.

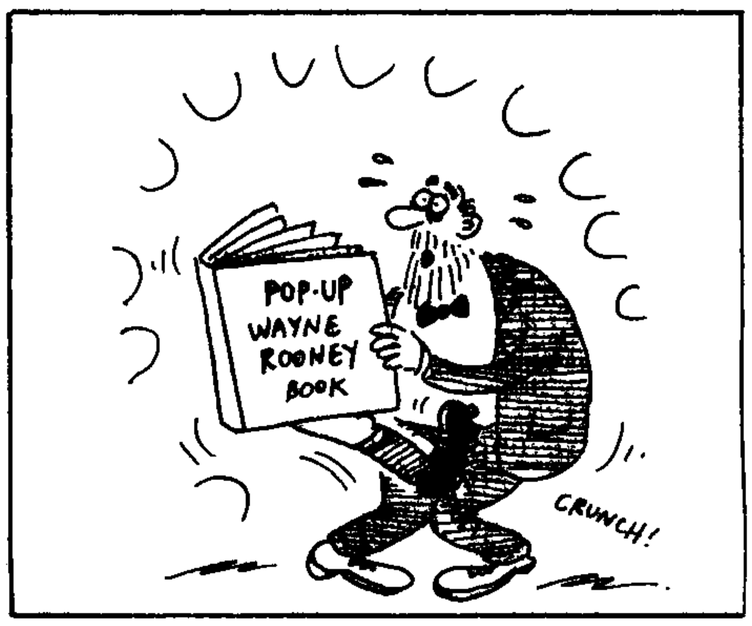
Of course, any good *book* on fitness will tell you to do a proper warm up before weight lifting or using squat machines. Anyone for a jog around the reference section?

■ THREE small part-time libraries in Powys won a stay of execution after councillors on the county's scrutiny committee ruled the closure plans "flawed".

Closing Llanfair Caereinion, Llanwrtyd Wells and Talgarth libraries was to have to saved £56,000, with council chiefs saying it was that or lose the mobile children's library. The council has been told to look elsewhere for cuts.

Meanwhile this picture of protesters outside Talgarth library from the Brecon and Radnor Express suggests the need for more literacy facilities, not fewer.





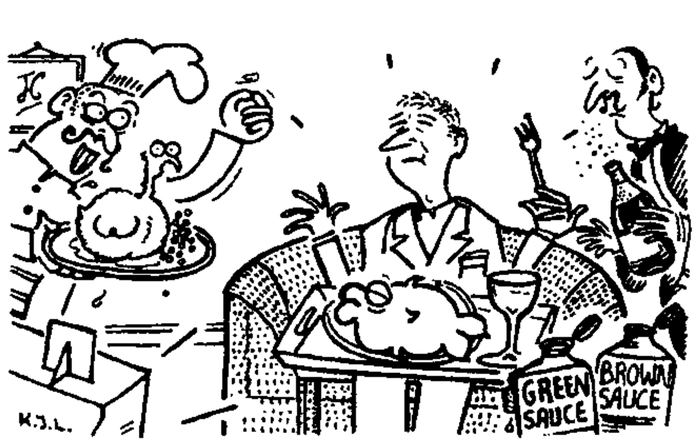
Pseuds Corner

The paintings of artist El Greco inspired Solo, the new men's fragrance by Loewe.

The Tatler

The most compelling thing about [Noel] Edmonds is that he now carries his damage openly. He reeks of it, seems to find comfort in it. It connects him with the outside world, in contrast with his old glibness and safeness, which created an undertone of mediocrity.

CHRISSY ILEY,
Guardian



The food is more or less what you might cook at home. Guinea fowl with Umbrian lentils and parsley sauce, roast halibut with green sauce, that sort of thing.

JASPER CONRAN eats at the Petersham Nurseries, *Observer Food Monthly*

I am in a Tolpuddle frame of mind. Due to attend the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival in Dorset, I find myself not getting there, but spending the weekend thinking much about it. From school age onwards I have spent years passing through the thoroughfare that is Tolpuddle Street in London N1. Running close by is Copenhagen Street, the site, I now discover, of a 19th-century demonstration, 150,000-strong, held in support of the martyrs shortly after their deportation 172 years ago. I drive up and down Copenhagen Street several times at the weekend, as if attending the Dorset festival in spirit.

SAFFRON BURROWS's diary,
New Statesman

[Actor Stephen] Mangan has lovely eyes. Densely lashed, they are the muted moss green of Sligo after rain.

PATRICIA NICOL,
Sunday Times

"It's very important to look for opportunities beyond the traditional areas to expose your artist. Charity, for example, is very important. Getting involved with a charity is an opportunity to show how sensitive the group are and show that they want to be there for their fans, but it also makes for a strong press angle. The Make A Wish foundation had a girl who only had about seven months to live and her wish was to meet with the Backstreet Boys, so we arranged it. So it was very touching, very nice. But that one charitable event gave us a lot of mileage with press and promotion. And, of course, it was very heartfelt."

LOU PEARLMAN, former manager of the Backstreet Boys, *Music Week*

Pseuds Corporate

I walk on two legs and I think you do need the granular base as well as the abstract theory-orientated discipline.

Local Government information unit Chief Executive TIM THOROGOOD , *Public Servant Magazine*

CONTRIBUTORS: Oliver Kellett, Sarah Johnson (and many others), Nik Speller, Ben Dowell, Laura Craig Gray, Adam Webb, Paul Steeples.

IN THE BACK

BECHTEL

OVER-RATED AND OVER HERE?

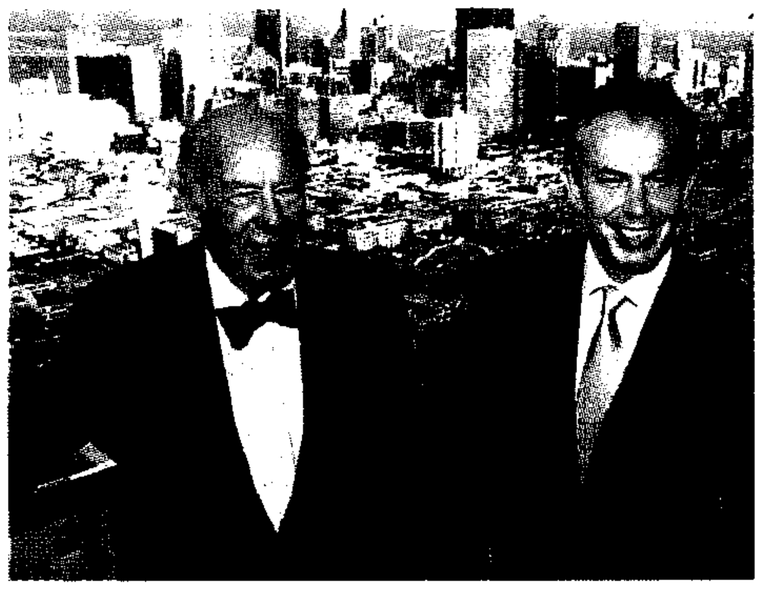
TONY BLAIR's dinner in California with George Schultz (pictured right), veteran political fixer and former boss of Bechtel, sparked much press speculation that the prime minister may be looking for a job with the firm or that the firm may be looking for more jobs with the British government. Or both.

Bechtel's prospects for finding work over here are certainly strong: Gordon Brown is as big a fan as Blair. And this April the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) even lifted a ban on the firm bidding for early British atomic clean-up contracts (work from which Bechtel had been barred because it helped set up the NDA and was seen as having an unfair commercial advantage). Now it can merrily bid away and is sure to win some major contracts. Great news for Bechtel – but to judge by recent events in the US, not necessarily such great new s for Britain.

In the US Bechtel is in charge of the proposed underground atom waste store at Yucca Mountain. Last year, however, the US Department of Labour said the company should pay $250,000 to Ronald Dollens, a Yucca pipe-fitter whom it had sacked for whistleblowing.

Workers at Hanford

Dollens says he objected to management-directed sabotage. He claimed that Bechtel management told workers to build a pipe diverting water around a government water meter so they could pump more than the firm was allowed, and to deliberately break another pipe so they could claim extra payment for mending it. Dollens says he endured "a lot of harassment" before he was sacked. Three other pipe-fitters who say they were sacked because they refused to sign affidavits for the firm against Dollens are also fighting Bechtel in the courts. The company, meanwhile, is appealing the Dollens compensation award, one of a string of fines imposed on the firm under whistleblower legislation in the US nuclear industry.



Jobs for the boy... or for Bechtel?

In May whistleblowers working for Bechtel on the Hanford nuclear reservation, a massive atomic waste dump in Washington State, contacted the press through a watchdog group called the Government Accountability Project. They passed on many documents showing that Bechtel had found dangerous faults in its own steel nuclear waste tank. The government had given Bechtel $15m to build the tank, but the papers showed that Bechtel inspectors found that dangerous faults had been passed by an earlier inspection and were only uncovered later by what company papers called "dumb luck".

The US Department of Energy said Bechtel had a "less than adequate safety and quality culture" at Hanford two months previously.

As well as nuclear work, Bechtel has a high profile in Iraqi "reconstruction". The firm had a $50m contract to rebuild Basra's children's hospital in a scheme championed by President Bush's wife and Condi Rice. However, the firm was removed from the job this month, with the project two years behind schedule and costs having more than doubled. Bechtel claimed the problems were entirely due to the security situation, but the Iraqi health ministry said the firm was also to blame. US auditors found the ballooning costs had been effectively hidden by government officials.

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES

With a Cherry on top

NO SOONER had consultants at Atkins Global confirmed that Countryside Properties, the government's favourite developer, had indeed covered up the existence of serious asbestos contamination at a former textile factory site (see last Eye), than Rochdale council asked the developer for its money back.

Council leader Alan Taylor has called for Countryside Properties to pay the £80,000 cost of the Atkins report into contaminated land at the former Turner Brothers site.

"I am asking Countryside Properties to relieve this burden on the taxpayers of Rochdale," he said last week. "£80,000 is a huge amount of money. The results speak for themselves and we would hope that Countryside Properties now show commitment to the safe development of the site by meeting the costs of this independent report."

Meanwhile in Bow, east London, Countryside has almost completed a new block of flats without planning permission.

Locals informed Tower Hamlets council that CP was not sticking to its plans in March after they noticed that the development had "moved" three metres nearer to their homes in Rainhill Way, blocking out the light. Even though what was being built was clearly not what had been approved, council planners were not particularly sympathetic to residents' concerns. Silke Stolz, a junior council planner, told homeowner Paraskevi O'Riordan: "If you want to look out on green spaces move to the country." She then told Mrs O'Riordan that the relevant plans had been archived and could not be inspected by residents. Four months after work began the council finally advised CP to stop building.

Meanwhile tests completed by Ray of Light Consulting on the effect of the development on neighbouring homes show that it fails Building Research Establishment guidelines on eight counts, blocking light into the residents' kitchens, gardens and living rooms.

Though a fresh planning proposal has been requested – not that that will do the residents any good – Tower Hamlets development control manager Stephen Irvine is still far from critical of Countryside. He has described the belief that planning permission is required for all new building work as "an urban myth".

And perhaps it is if you happen to be New Labour's favourite developer – and owned by a prominent member of the government's "urban task force", Alan Cherry CBE.

WEALTH & EFFICIENCY

Gordon is a moron...

DETAILS emerging of the so-called "savings" to be made by HM Revenue and Customs under the efficiency programme announced before the last election to prove that the Iron Chancellor could be tough on bureaucracy suggest Gordon Brown is putting political advantage over the needs of the economy.

An internal HMRC document seen by the *Eye* reveals that 2,150 jobs are to be cut from work that pays for itself many times over: catching the country's tax dodgers. The cuts will supposedly "save" £72m a year – but the very next line of the document shows that the price will be an annual direct "yield reduction", ie uncollected tax, of £240m. Brilliant!

Naturally, while the £72m will add to the sums allegedly saved and be proclaimed as slashing waste in Whitehall, the lost revenue (enough for a very large hospital, several schools or a large chunk of the Iraq war bill every year) will be quietly forgotten.

A quarter of a billion in fact grossly underestimates the real cost of the cuts as the main payback from chasing tax cheats comes not from what they are made to cough up but from stopping them doing it again and deterring others who might be tempted. The true loss is likely to wipe out the total £507m annual savings the Chancellor has promised for HMRC by 2008.

The document reveals just who can now be less worried about the taxman giving them the once over. The largest single reduction (409 jobs) will be made in checking that employers meet their tax obligations, including "IR35 work [the contentious rule that deems many contractors to be employees] ... although in these areas we will need to take account of politically [sic] sensitivity".

Tax dodgers' friend?

Other lucky winners include people who submit dodgy income tax self-assessments, who will have 390 fewer investigators to fear. The chancellor's generosity extends to companies on the fiddle too, as the number of corporation tax investigators will be reduced by 153.

The plans also demonstrate the cynicism of the Treasury's Public Service Agreements (PSAs). Particular enthusiasm is shown for cuts that won't hit performance against these targets – never mind the real consequences. Thus HMRC gleefully proposes: "Reduction in environmental and gambling tax assurance [40 job cuts] – where no PSA targets exist". So much for prudent Gordon's green credentials.

Earlier this year the National Audit Office reviewed the government's efficiency plans and reported of HMRC's progress: "Few risks. Most of the savings are to be achieved through the reduction of staff, where measurement poses little risk." Nobody told the auditors that slashing tax collecting jobs might actually *cost* the taxpayer money, something the Chancellor must have been relieved hadn't been spotted. Until now.

EMPLOYMENT LAW

When I'm 65

EMPLOYERS around the country are waking up to the fact that in three months' time they will be bound by new age discrimination legislation. Many are therefore getting rid of their oldies now, before they are stuck with them until they are 65.

Even government-funded, non-departmental public bodies like the Natural History Museum are up to it, it seems. The South Kensington museum has just waved goodbye to six of its security staff who have clocked up a creditable 100 years of loyal service between them. Two are about to hit 60, the age at which the museum can still safely get rid of them during the brief window of opportunity under current retirement legislation. The other four had been allowed to stay on beyond 60… until now.

The *Eye* asked the museum if it was cynically avoiding its new commitment to older staff and was told that it has a number of people working beyond the 60-year retirement age across the departments who continue to be "highly valued". However, it had recently reviewed its security procedures and said changes needed to be made "in order for the museum to remain a secure environment". That just happened to involve axing the six oldest, who have long and loyally enabled the museum to remain a "secure environment".

BANKERS

Hype hype hooray

THE Royal Bank of Scotland's (RBS) announcement that it would install 300 new free cashpoints in deprived areas won it many pats on the back in the press.

The bank was trying to head off MPs' complaints that poor customers only have regular access to cash machines that charge for withdrawals. But the gesture looks a lot less generous when you consider that RBS subsidiary Hanco operates 6,000 charge-to-use cash machines – a substantial slice of the expanding, fee-charging cash machine business.

The free cash point announcement was also made shortly before the bank announced half-yearly profits of £4.5bn. A coincidence… or a slick bit of PR to try to stave off another "greedy banks" story?

RBS also produces a swathe of "corporate responsibility" reports; but as green groups like Platform, Friends of the Earth and others point out, these only present a polished version of the firm's impact. RBS has signed up to the "Equator Principles", an international voluntary code for responsible investing. Yet, unlike most other banking signatories, RBS is investing in Shell's Sakhalin 2 project, a massive Russian oil pipeline criticised by the Russian government, locals and environmentalists over fears of pollution, spills and the danger it poses to whales. RBS also financed the controversial Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, from the Caspian Sea to the Med, another massive oil project criticised for the effect on human rights in countries along its route and potential pollution problems.

RBS also participated in massive loans to Angola to be repaid with oil receipts. These loans have been criticised for getting round World Bank and IMF anti-corruption measures and allowing Angolan oil to be sold without public accountability. Still, a few free cash machines make a good story.

CHAGOS ISLANDS

Homeland insecurity

THE Chagos islanders' hopes of an early return to their homeland were again crushed, when the Foreign & Commonwealth Office last month lodged yet another appeal against their high court victory.

Back in May, two high court judges ruled that the orders in council preventing the Chagossians from going home were "repugnant" and illegal. But the United States, which leases the largest of the British-held islands, Diego Garcia, as a naval base, claims the settlement of a civilian population nearby would "significantly degrade the strategic importance of a vital military asset". So naturally the Foreign Office wants to defend the Americans' interests.

Meanwhile the Department for Work and Pensions won a court judgment stopping any of the 300 exiled islanders living in Britain (the rest of the 4,000 mainly live in Mauritius) from claiming job seeker's allowance or housing in the United Kingdom because they, er, have no intention of permanently settling here.

ACCOUNTANCY

Deloitte: not so absolutely Fabb

THE lengths to which accountants Deloitte will go to make a few quid have been exposed again – not in a blaze of publicity at the high court as in the recent BCCI debacle, but at a low key auction in the West Midlands.

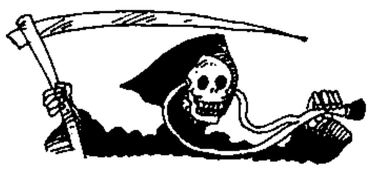
Three months ago *Eye* 1157 reported how three years ago the beancounters pushed a group of manufacturing companies run by businessman David Fabb into administration. After Fabb complained, Deloitte launched a series of dubious legal actions against him and his family stretching the lucrative process out and racking up more than £3m in fees in the process.

The legal claims rumble on but the hopelessness of the main one has now emerged. Nine months ago the Deloitte administrators claimed to own the machinery used by another Fabb company that was nothing to do with the administration – despite clear evidence that the plant was on hire purchase from one of the company's banks. The effect was to prevent this company being turned round as it couldn't raise cash while ownership of its assets was disputed. Yet last month, lo and behold, the machinery was flogged off at knock down prices at auction, with the cash going straight to the bankers – giving the lie to Deloitte's claim. Alas, it's all emerged too late for the company, CKE Engineering: scuppered by Deloitte's spurious claims, it has closed with the loss of 100 jobs.

Unlike most businessmen left to the mercies of the Deloitte administrators, David Fabb refuses to take matters lying down and has unearthed some revealing details about how it has made a mint from his companies while regulators remain indifferent at best. When Fabb complained to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), the bean-counters' professional association and self-regulatory body, he was told there was "no prima facie case" against Deloitte. This blind eye was turned despite proof that the fees Deloitte had charged were themselves more guesswork than the product of proper billing: figures seen by the *Eye* showed, for example, that the cumulative hours booked by the partners on certain categories of work fell over time while others increased wildly. The beancounters had even incorrectly charged for the costs of an internal investigation into allegations of corruption by a (now ex-) Deloitte manager on the case.

Fabb took his case to the ICAEW's "independent reviewer" who concluded that the principal administrator, Deloitte partner Andrew Peters' "objectivity could reasonably be seen to be prejudiced" as he had performed the very financial review (itself hotly disputed) that put the companies into the administration from which he would go on to earn a fortune – as clear a conflict of interest as there could be.

Yet despite these failings, no action has been taken against Peters or the firm.



NHS plc: a dire diagnosis

NO SOONER had a cross-party committee of MPs heavily criticised the government's use of independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) than the Department of Health defiantly announced that these private sector companies would be given £1bn worth of contracts to run a series of "diagnostic centres".

The identities of the lucky firms show how commercial the business of healthcare has become. The London and east England contract goes to **Amicus InHealth** – a reassuring but, as *Eye* 1158 revealed, somewhat misleading name. The company is owned by a consortium of South African private health outfit **Netcare**, which botched a contract to provide cataract operations in Oxfordshire; **Apax**, a private equity group set up by New Labour favourite Sir Ronald Cohen; and **Inhealth**, a company chaired by serial private health director Tim Chessells and owned by a mysterious Luxembourg fund called Pegasus.

Doubtless this bunch has nothing but the nation's health in mind as it makes crucial diagnoses and won't be unduly inclined to push people to independent treatment centres of the sort run by, er, Netcare.

Meanwhile in the South West the record of the (management) consultants at **Atos Origin** in providing the over-priced and unpopular choose-and-book system for hospital referrals was no bar to their success. Nor in the South East were there too many concerns about the conflicts of interest presented by handing the diagnosis deal to the country's biggest private hospital operator, the tax-dodging **BUPA**.

West Midlands patients will be able to benefit from the services of **Mercury Healthcare**, the company that has already been paid millions for work it hasn't done (see *Eyes* 1155 and 1163) and whose "group strategy director" is one Mark Smith, the former chief executive of Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust who resigned after the trust received zero stars. From there he became head of health at PFI firm Amey working closely with Ken Anderson… who now just happens to be doling out the diagnostic centre contracts as "commercial director" of the NHS.

Appropriately enough in the North East the diagnostics contract has gone to **Alliance Medical**, the company owned by yet another private equity group, **Bridgepoint** – former employer of Geordie New Labour man and ex-Health Secretary Alan Milburn. The company's previous forays into the health service include a £95m contract to run MRI scans which were so poor they had to be checked by the NHS anyway, leading the British Medical Association to describe the firm's performance as "a complete disaster".

So depending on where you live, your next illness could well be diagnosed by an incompetent or a profiteer – or more likely a combination of the two.

CASE NOTES

1. PRIVATE AMBULANCES

THE developing market for public-private partnerships in ambulance services is proving to be a brilliant success and great value for the NHS and its patients. Or not, as the case may be.

A series of emails has reached the *Eye* from staff at the South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SECAM). They are fed up having to pick up patients who the private company GSL (more accustomed to prisoner and court escort work) had been paid and contracted to carry.

GSL won the contract for non-emergency patients in Surrey while emergency work remained with the NHS. Routine day patients are of course the most financially attractive to private bidders as they only requires mini-buses and ambulance care assistants. But insiders suggest that when GSL won the contract, it underestimated the level of care and demand for non-emergency inter-hospital transfers, which do require qualified ambulance technicians and paramedics to be on hand with a fully-equipped ambulance.

Hospitals in Surrey frustrated by GSL – one patient waited nine hours for an ambulance to take them home from A&E – have therefore had to start coming up with ever more ingenious ways to make their patients fulfill the criteria that requires them to be carried in an NHS ambulance. Sometimes this means deciding that a patient is more ill than was first thought.

One email reveals how a community hospital in the county had recently been trying to book a return journey for a dialysis patient in the morning and had been told there was no GSL ambulance available until after midnight that night. The hospital later called back via the 999 service saying that the patient's condition had deteriorated and was an emergency. On arrival, the ambulance paramedic found that the patient had slightly low blood pressure – but having just had dialysis this was not unusual.

Earlier this month, complaint and confusion

led to SECAM emailing hospitals and trusts, saying that it would only undertake inter-hospital transfers for those patients whose life or limb was "immediately threatened". In addition it has also agreed – as an interim arrangement – to deal with life support intensive care cases.

It underlined that services beyond that were the responsibility of GSL, with in-transit clinical support services having to be provided by the acute trust involved in the transfer. While SECAM would have liked to be able to do more, it "could not risk the inevitable impact on its emergency services" and the risk to patients.

"As I have stated before, SECAM cannot become the default provider as a result of dissatisfaction with the contracted provider," wrote SECAM's Gary Butson. And to think that GSL's bid was only marginally cheaper than that from the NHS.

2. THE PROCURER

MORE news of American health supplies procurement firm DHL/Novation, to whom Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt intends to award a £4bn contract to supply the NHS (see *Eye* 1157).

Novation will take over from the in-house, not-for-profit NHS Logistics at the end of the year. Perhaps unusually for an arm of the NHS, Logistics has a reputation for efficiency, last year returning some £3m to NHS trusts as a rebate. Nevertheless it is being replaced by a private American outfit that has been involved in some disturbing events in the US.

Medical Supply Chain, a Missouri company that develops software which enables hospitals to order supplies direct from manufacturers, has alleged that Novation and Neoforma, a dot-com company whose bubble burst in 2000 shortly after it went public in 2000 and in which Novation has a fifty percent stake, conspired with manufacturers, distributors and suppliers to charge $100bn in excess costs to US hospitals since 2002.

With an anti-trust lawsuit lodged by the Missouri company, which is seeking $1.5bn in damages from Novation and Neoforma, it is perhaps no surprise Novation is keen to get into the UK market before the shit hits the fan.

As the largest Group Purchase Organisation (GPO) in the US, Novation was also recently involved in a $420m anti-trust judgment in a Los Angeles federal court over its reluctance over several years to provide doctors with a new kind of pulse oximeter that they wanted. It measures a patient's blood oxygen levels and is produced by Masimo Corp, but Novation had an agreement to purchase an inferior product from another company.

Back in Britain Hewitt's decision is all the more surprising coming as US doctors are complaining that GPOs like Novation *don't* save hospitals money and *don't* always procure the equipment staff believe is of most benefit to patients.

In addition, America's largest trade union, the 1.6 million-strong Service Employees International union (SEIU), has also voiced concerns about Novation. Giving evidence to the US senate judiciary committee, the SEIU testified that it was "concerned that questionable practices by the nation's largest GPO, Novation, lead to rising costs in the health care supply chain, while at the same time limiting provider choices in a way that risks the safety of both health care workers and their patients…"

Hewitt does know what she's doing, doesn't she?

BRITISH GAS

Disconnected... from reality

HELEN MACKENZIE of Penshurst in Kent was sent an urgent message by British Gas earlier this year.

"Amount owing: £2367.41. You have not paid your gas bill. Unless you pay immediately we will get a warrant to enter your home and disconnect your gas supply… The police may be present when we call… We have charged you £10 for this letter and will charge you an additional £30 for the cost of your disconnection visit."

Alarming stuff, except that Penshurst has no gas supply – a fact that pensioner Mrs Mackenzie is only too aware of, having spent years on the local parish council.

A flurry of letters went back and forth, with Mrs Mackenzie pointing out the lack of gas and British Gas sending several bland "your enquiry is important to us… we are looking at your enquiry" letters from the "customer correspondence" department, as well as bill after bill, followed by threats of legal action.

Mrs Mackenzie contacted the EnergyWatch watchdog, but British Gas sent yet more threats to get a warrant to cut off her gas supply and fit a pre-payment metre, for which they would charge an extra £235.

At last she managed to get through on the phone to someone who said everything was sorted out and the account had been cleared. A few days later, yet another man arrived asking to be let in to read the gas meter.

The Eye contacted British Gas, which promised to look into it. A few days later it got in touch to say it had all been down to human error as Mrs Mackenzie "shares an identical name and similar address to a property in another village that is on the gas supply. Unfortunately there's been an unintentional muddling of the two creating a gas account for Mrs Mackenzie based on a meter being used elsewhere."

British Gas said it had now confirmed that no money was owed and was sending Mrs Mackenzie some flowers "by way of apology". Which is lovely… but why wasn't this resolved by Mrs Mackenzie's first letter explaining the situation? Can't anyone at British Gas read?

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE much-trumpeted freezing by the Treasury of bank accounts belonging to suspects of the airline bombing plot may once again reveal a triumph of form over substance.

Reports from Pakistan talk of thousands of pounds transferred in small amounts to buy tickets. But those engaged in terrorist activities rarely use the high street banks which are subject to Treasury freeze orders. They usually prefer the unofficial money transfer systems common in the Middle East, Africa and Indian sub-continent. These are harder to trace and penetrate.

Financial sanctions are operated by the Bank of England against more than 160 terrorist linked groups, of which 140 are termed Islamic, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. These sanctions had frozen a grand total of £500,000 according to a parliamentary answer given last March. This answer referred only to al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but may well represent the totality of the amounts currently frozen, given earlier parliamentary answers.

That £500,000 figure compared with £378,000 frozen by UK financial institutions in 45 accounts linked to all forms of terrorism given by the Treasury a year before. Of this, £347,000 had been frozen in the UK since 9/11 – the balance of £31,000 was frozen before.

These figures are not broken down in relation to amounts linked to specific groups, so it currently includes all those on the Bank's banned list. This means not just 360 named individuals and 124 entities linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban. There are also 85 individuals and 58 entities grouped under "Terrorist Financing" who stretch from Northern Ireland, via Gaza and Chechnya, to Colombia and Peru – not to mention individuals linked to past regimes in Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, plus the current regimes in Burma, Belarus and Zimbabwe.

That £500,000 is all that remains of nearly £80m frozen since 9/11 – the same figure to which the £378,000 was related. The remainder was largely returned to the new governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Which rather suggests that these freezing orders do little to stem the flow of money to terrorists who anyway require very little to execute their plans. They can obtain funds either from cash collections at mosques or by frauds as well as "hawala" transfers – none of which is picked up on the Treasury radar.

"Darling, it's probably your new hi-def TV that makes it look worse than it is!"

ONE of the largest compensation settlements achieved by the Serious Farce Office has recently been finally extracted from jailed Danish conman Bjorn Stiedl, pillager of the Balfon pension fund.

Stiedl last month agreed to hand over more than £2.5m after almost two years of prevarication and pleading poverty. However, there is concern that some or all of the money handed over, which includes a £250,000 contribution to prosecution costs, may have come from yet another possible fraud – this time targeting investors in a failed film partnership tax avoidance scheme.

Stiedl was convicted in November 2004 of defrauding the Balfon pensioners. However, he was not sentenced to 4½ years imprisonment until a year ago because of the pending trial of his accomplice, Danish lawyer Carsten Iversen, jailed for two years in June 2005.

In deciding on the term of his imprisonment, Judge Wadsworth took into account the fact that Stiedl (who had been found effectively guilty of the fraud in 2002 in a civil action brought by the pension trustees, but had made no repayment pending the criminal trial) had arranged to repay £2.8m to the pension fund. Wadsworth declared that he had reduced "substantially" Stiedl's jail sentence for what he termed "a very skilful, calculated and deliberate fraud" because of this belated offer.

Stiedl was supposed to make the payment by late September in order to avoid criminal confiscation proceedings. September came and went without any payment. So did a number of court hearings. Stiedl claimed he could not make the payment because the money was in an offshore trust for the benefit of his daughter and the trustees sadly would not release the money.

With judicial patience wearing thin and the certainty of a compensation hearing and possibly an extended prison sentence – Stiedl has to serve two thirds of his current sentence and is due out in late 2007 – suddenly the trustees became more co-operative and £2.5m-plus has been paid. Which is good news for the pensioners and the SFO, which showed a commendable persistence to make Stiedl pay. However, the affair shows how even convicted defendants can run rings round courts that are far too accommodating.

But now comes the question about the origins of the payment. Stiedl is currently being sued – along with lawyers Collyer-Bristow and accountants Pridie Brewster, among others – over the collapse of a series of tax schemes promoted during 2002 and 2003 while he was on bail from the Balfon charges. Stiedl was charged in 2000. The ruling against him in the civil case was in 2002.

Some 70 investors in the Bedford Row Film Partnership schemes have lost at least £3m. They claim that only two of the 20 promised films – which had titles like "Lunatic Lover" and "Nude Descending" – were ever made. As a result the tax deductions claimed for their investments did not succeed. High rate taxpayers can usually claim 100 percent of the film cost, although only providing 20 percent of the finance – the balance is provided by a bank, in this case Société Générale.

Just how much Stiedl profited from the Bedford Row schemes is unclear – he made more than £1m from Balfon. He was very much the driving force and had previously been involved in a tax-related scam in Denmark. However, he is unlikely to be in a position to repay, which leaves the professional deep pockets of Collyer-Bristow and Pridie Brewster. The question here of course is what they were doing acting in an investment scheme for a man who was awaiting trial for fraud?

LAST month's fire at the Iron Mountain document depository in Bow, east London, destroyed records for many leading banks and other financial institutions, plus top law firms as well as the City Police.

Although the documents were described as "archived, inactive business records", these are understood to include documents relating to sensitive cases – including possibly those involving NatWest, Royal Bank of Scotland and Enron – although it is hard to imagine these were not kept in-house given the current civil and criminal legal activity.

Investigations are ongoing into the cause of the fire at the 125,000sq ft facility. The fire completely destroyed all the paper records maintained there.

Once the cause is established, it is expected that there will be considerable lucrative exercise for the legal profession in establishing who is to pay for the damage. Even if the fire was caused by arson – still not ruled out – the apparent failure of the sprinkler system or other factors is expected to become a subject for litigation.

A fire at another Iron Mountain facility in Canada the previous day resulted in less than 1 percent of the records being lost because the fire suppressant system worked.

The Bow bill could be huge. A 1997 fire in the US has already generated payments of up to $65m. But there is also the knock-on issue of how those firms whose paper records were not stored electronically elsewhere will now deal with any regulatory or legal inquiries. Records are supposed to be held for up to seven years. How soon will it be before the excuse to be presented to regulators and courts for some past embarrassment or failure will be that all the records were destroyed in the Bow fire and so cannot now be produced?

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

THE now formalized investigation into the admitted irregularities at iSoft is certain to focus on the role of the software group's audit committee which is supposed to oversee accounting policies.

The "aggressive" revenue recognition accountancy policy used to boost Isoft's profits, which is at the heart of the scandal, are indicated by the minutes of the last audit committee meeting attended by senior non-executive director and former CBI chief Digby Jones on 15 June 2004.

Jones was thanked for "his contribution over the past four years". Exactly how much (or more likely how little) that was is now likely to feature in the ongoing iSoft investigation. Jones resigned from iSoft last year.

Also present at that meeting were founder chairman Patrick Cryne, former finance director and chief executive Tim Whiston – both have since left the company after cashing in shares worth millions – and then finance director John Whelan, who suddenly quit six months later claiming he wanted a new career in private equity. "It felt like an appropriate point," he said. How true!

Two representatives from the then auditor RSM Robson Rhodes – Glyn Williams and Richard Baldwin – were also there to assist the committee.

Robson Rhodes told the meeting that £30m of the expected £120m in licence revenue from the NHS software project had already been recognized in the accounts which were being finalized for the year to April 2004.

Taking account of revenue when contracts were signed but before the money was received is the key iSoft issue. The 2004 accounts, along with those for the following year, have had to be restated since Robson Rhodes was replaced by Deloitte – which termed these accounting policies "aggressive" when it carried out a due diligence report for merger partner Torex in 2003.

iSoft's accounting policy for revenue recognition would have been decided by the finance directors and the auditors. Whiston and Whelan as well as Cryne are all accountants.

In the absence of the executive directors, Robson Rhodes confirmed its relationship was "good and open". Its "major concerns" were "the need for a contract costing system which had been an issue for several years" and the need for a "general accounting system across the expanded group".

Non-executive director Rene Kern raised the issue of risk management. The result was the conclusion that this "was not an embedded process in the business". Part of that risk should have involved problems with the NHS contract. It was agreed the risk issue would be taken up with the executive directors.

Robson Rhodes was asked whether there was any other matter it wanted to raise. There was none. So the "aggressive" accountancy policies went unchallenged. A matter Digby Jones and his fellow non-executives, not to mention Robson Rhodes, may come to regret if there are civil actions or possible criminal proceedings.

'Slicker'

MILLS & TAX BOON

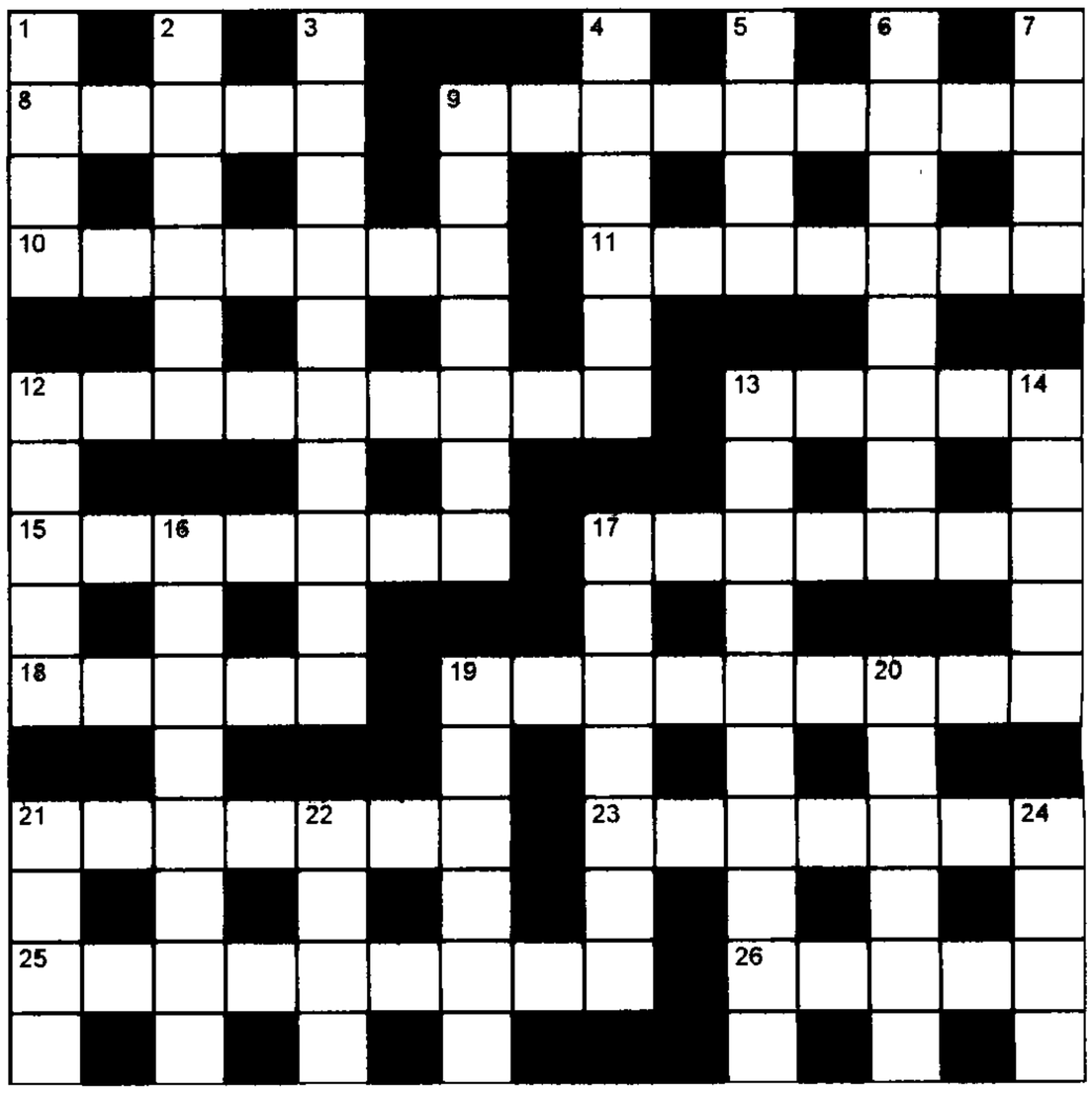
THE Inland Revenue's timidity in dealing with the country's richer and better-connected tax dodgers is proving costly, as advisers begin to cite the case of Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell's husband David Mills in their pleas for leniency for clients who get caught under-declaring their income.

When a bent tax lawyer like Mills can escape with a paltry penalty of 25 percent of the tax he tried to dodge by lying to the Revenue, runs the argument, why should their more ignorant and less scheming clients cough up much at all?

Eye 1154 pointed out how on the Revenue's own guidelines, as a lawyer telling porkies to the taxman, Mills should have been prosecuted. Tax evaders everywhere could now benefit from his let-off.

EYE CROSSWORD 320

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24 August 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

8 The main leaders of our country engender another nightmare (5)
9 Grant has sex with a goat's front bit – that shows taste! (4,2,1,2)
10 Piss artist, for example, backing the hidden aim of a party loan? (7)
11 Brenda's place as wife indoors? Slovenly and loveless (7)
12/21ac. Auto-engineered end of member? (9,7)
13 It's a piece of shit turning over rifles (5)
15 Butcher's Women possibly seek to get screwed (4-3)
17 Material balls (7)
18 Say Brown's comeback is the action of a pushy type? (5)
19 Unremitting Conservative support on drugs to a point (9)
21 See 12ac.
23 Approaches from beneath – "Has orgasm finished?" (5,2)
25 For nothing on earth is supposedly led by Bush (4,5)
26 Condoms? China has seconds! (5)

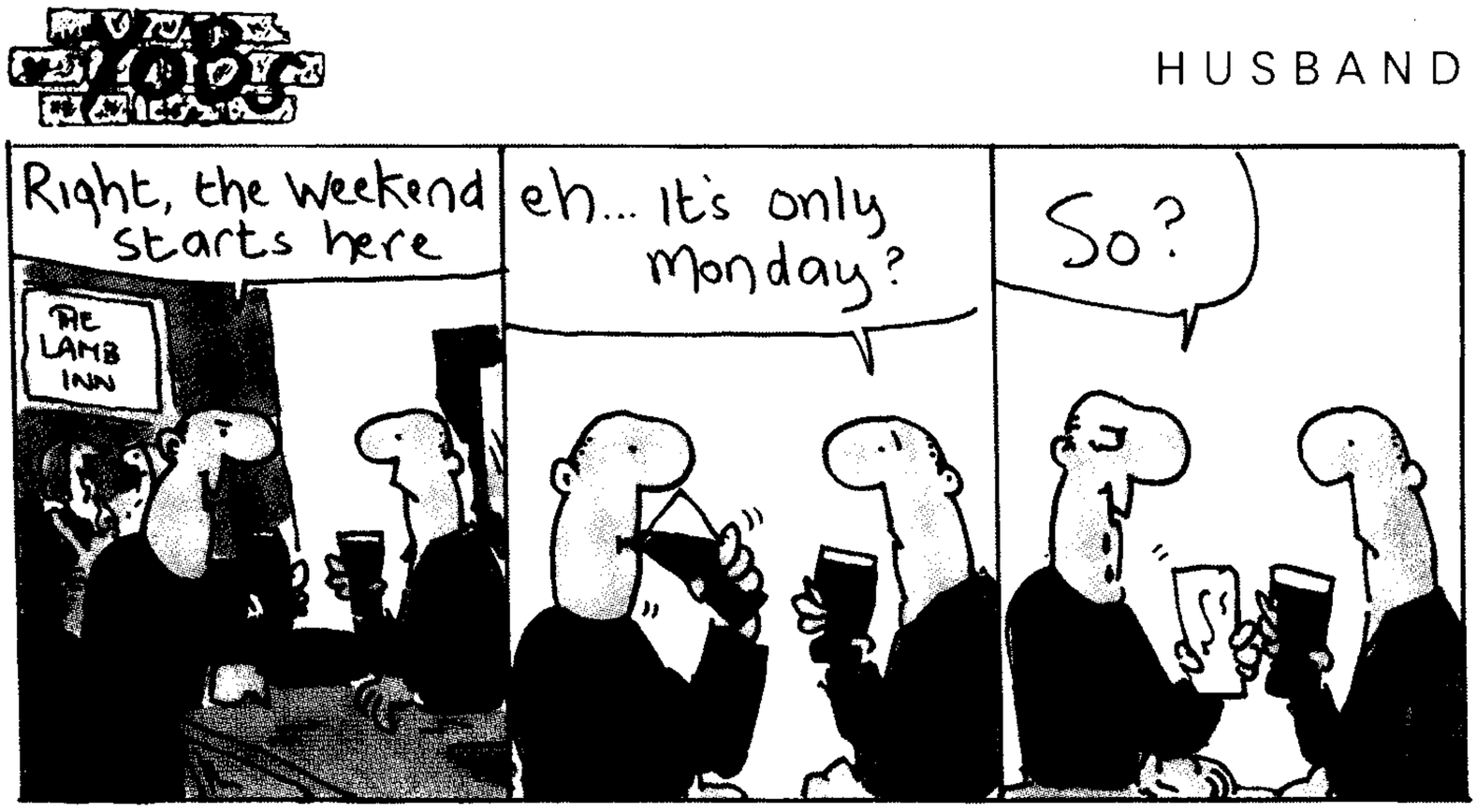
DOWN

1 See 21dn.
2 Private Eye gets stuck into hawk (plummy Brian) (6)
3 Abstained rashly, without Tony's lead – that's a bit off (2,3,5)
4 Swearing caused by, it's said, an "E" for example (6)
5 Some of us ignore the sticking up of two fingers? (4)
6 Drives home with erection - blown at *Yom Kippur?* (4,4)
7 See 24dn.
9 Getting leg over once excited, some Scots were infamously knocked off here (7)
12 Happy Londoner nursing an erection (5)
13 Unauthorised release of mole: make out journalist plays central role (6,4)
14 Understands when receiving head from Lewinsky (Monica) (5)
16 Wrinkly told off Cyclops in the taxman's clutches (3-5)
17 Florida: caught getting gobbled by tart – erection gone! (7)
19 Cameron's entrance sheer crap – laughed at on TV (6)
20 Nothing omitted from Brenda's *A to Z of Sham* (6)
21/1 Fatso wobbling in to soak butter up (4,4)
22 State involved in fellatio watch? (4)
24/7 Bloody awful number one oppressing the underprivileged (8)

Crossword 319 winner: J.A. Rumble

ACROSS: 8 Give head 9 Toerag 10/23 Born-again Christian 12 In drag 13 Blairite 14/16/17 Page Three Girl 18 Top-heavy 20 Aplomb 22/11 Rees-Mogg 25 Clause 26 Alter ego.

DOWN: 1 Big Ben 2 Tear-arse 3 Penang 4 Idea 5 Stone age 6 Weimar 7 Gangster 13 Barmy 15 Avowedly 16 Thatcher 17 Galtieri 19 Hush up 20 Assets 21 Manage 24 Ream.



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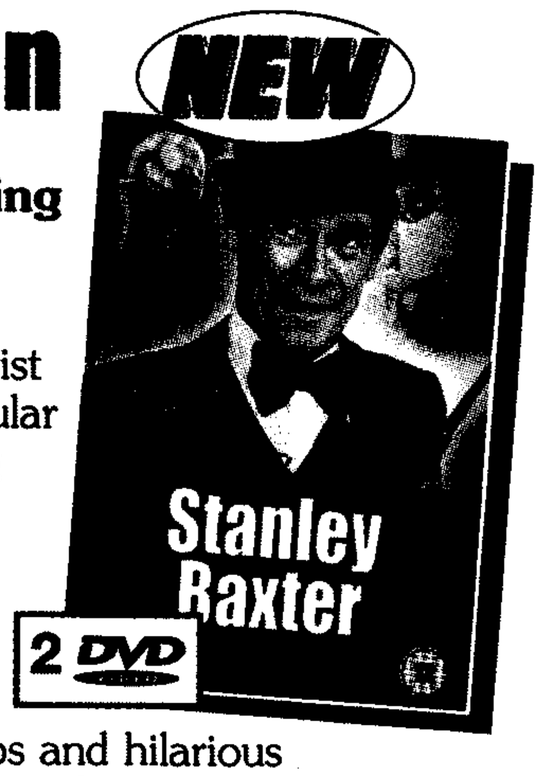

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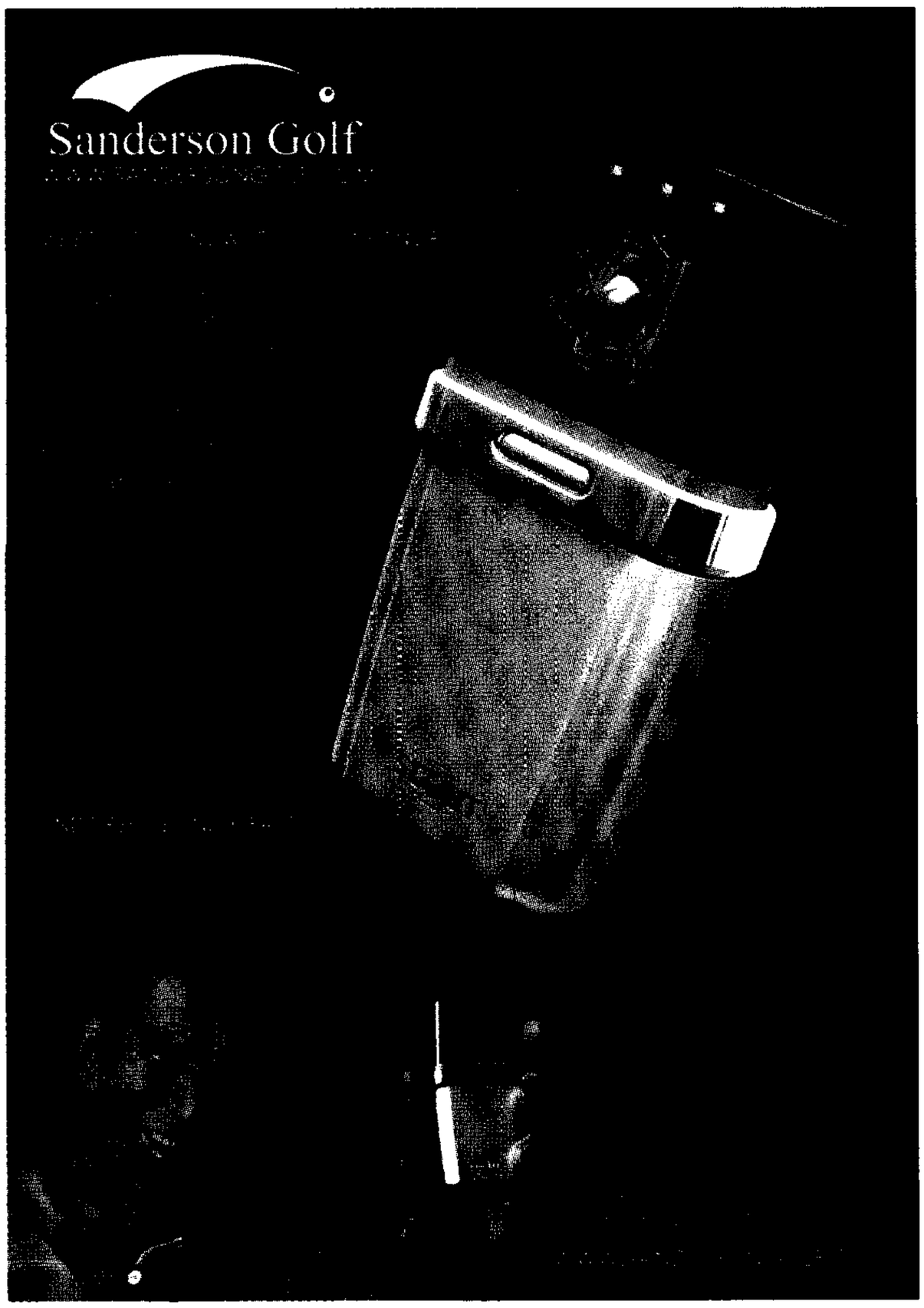

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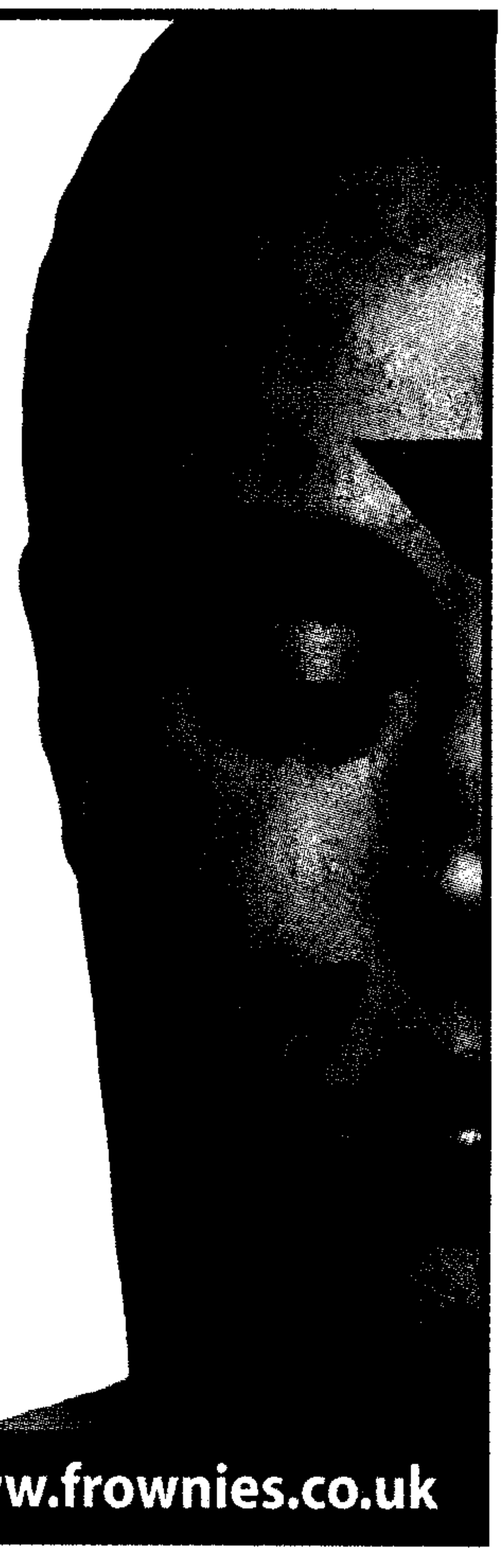

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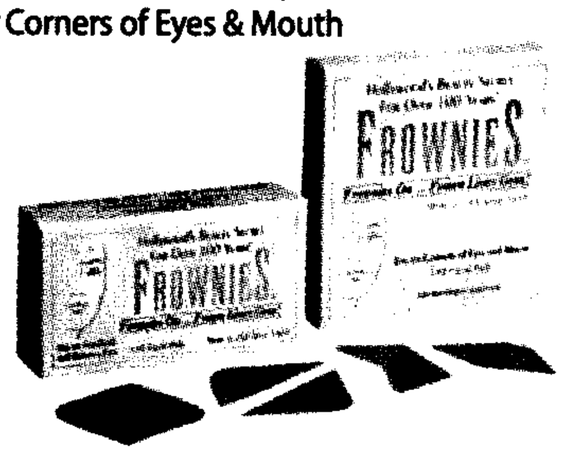

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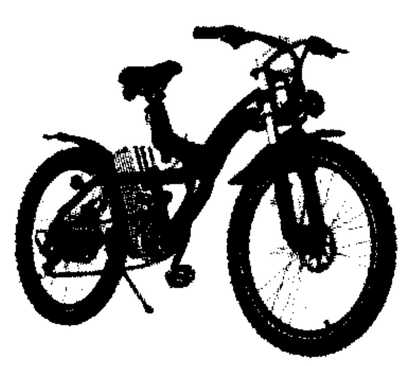

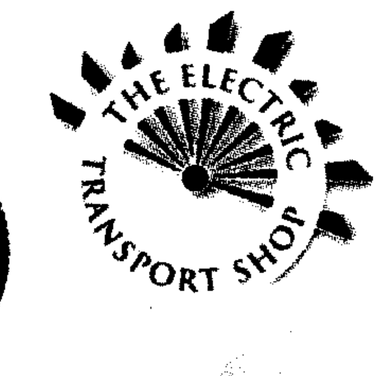

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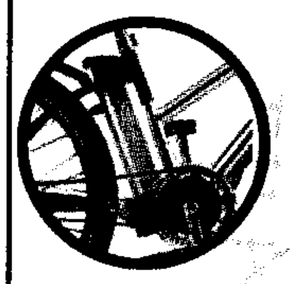

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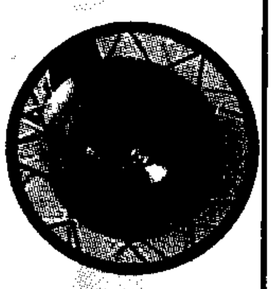

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Eye Need

MOBILE ADVENTURE CLUB needs £20,000 to complete transport requirement. Specialising in survival sea and land: Nature – bears and wolves: Slovenia – Croatia - Monte Negro – Albania - Greece. Nationwide, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 43253829. If interested call John on 07814 849 374 or 0795 8051 591.

DESPERATE FINANCIAL CRISIS and depression. Need £35K to prevent lost family home. NatWest, S/C: 60-60-02. A/C: 58214704.

VERY TALENTED designer / writer / creative, almost recovered from CFS/ME needs finance for a break plus mentor / coach / patronage to grow new career. Much to offer in return – or your money back. Details: factfox@yahoo.co.uk

MATURE STUDENT desperately needs finance for fees. S/C: 82-66-34. A/C: 70035656. Thanks. Email derkleineschotte@web.de

A GOOD JOB with prospects and decent pay! Currently stuck in dead end job with no future. Just married and new start would be great for us both NewLifeNewStart@googlemail.com

MONEY DESPERATELY NEEDED to do voluntary work with HIV/AIDS in Africa. Any donations very much appreciated. NatWest, S/C: 52-10-40. A/C: 04532961.

ARTIST NEEDS INSPIRATION, support and benefactor. Email: artistmuse@hotmail.co.uk

LET'S FACE THE MUSIC: all talent no money. S/C: 11-06-68. A/C: 00012340.

HARDWORKING, GENUINE single mother was setting up ecocentre, lost home and dream after robbery and assault. 25K desperately needed to rebuild life. NatWest, S/C: 53-50-36. A/C: 04852427. Thank you.

GENUINE AND DESPERATE to keep family together, 2c any help appreciated. Email: crobertson0722@yahoo.com for details. Many thanks.

PhD STUDENT international development, chronic debts needs help please! S/C: 40-14-17. A/C: 91865730.

LONG-TERM SICK HUSBAND, 4c. Drowning. Please help. S/C: 60-21-47. A/C: 58528342. Bless you.

DESPERATELY NEED HELP: family to support, 45K in debt. HSBC, S/C: 40-47-58. A/C: 93886867.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE to children. I've got the time. Have you got the money? S/C: 83-48-00. A/C: 00154427.

IMPOVERISHED YOUNG DIRECTOR needs £8.5K for exciting breakthrough production. HSBC, S/C: 40-15-22. A/C: 31696064. theatreneedsyou@ntlworld.com

HORROR MOVIE! Invest £30K and have speaking part. mscan@fsbdial.co.uk

MI5 TRIED TO KILL ME, 17 November 2001. Resulting legal action cost £30,000 so far; risk losing home. Please help, www.mi5.com (CreditCard/PayPal), Barclays, S/C: 20-21-78. A/C: 80884065.

TRUSTED CAROL, went with First Plus (Barclays) and being prudent, took out PPI. Redemption now 8K higher than original loan. Can't watch "Countdown" anymore! Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-92-07. A/C: 02012317.

FEMALE COMPOSER seeks £20K to orchestrate dream. SC: 87-34-36. AC: 06027689.

Eye Need

NEW FATHER started business to ensure family future. Suffering initial cashflow difficulties. Any help appreciated S/C: 08-92-86. A/C: 17391359.

NEED CASH: baby daughter needs cancer treatment S/C: 60-24-19. A/C: 89018583. Thanks.

NEED TO LOSE a few pounds? I'll help! S/C: 08-92-86. A/C: 03406274.

TALENTED FILM MAKER and performer looking for sponsor. www.annablack.com

STRUGGLING WRITER/MUSICIAN could really use your old Apple Mac computer. Email: iscr@fish.co.uk

£4K URGENTLY NEEDED, please help! Aim to pay back within two years if I can. Many thanks. S/C: 40-22-26. A/C: 41707825.

EX TEACHER, NO PENSION, creeping despair, last option small business. Please help with start up. Co-Op. S/C: 08-92-49. A/C: 02102919.

CAR WRITTEN OFF by joyriders, insurance doesn't cover, need £800. S/C: 16-26-32. A/C: 10224425.

SMALL SUBMERSIBLE or amphibian craft needed. Genuine offers to yellowsubmarine@kay-oss.co.uk

£10K+ OR 150/WK or spare room for Toltec RECAPITULATION! 1000's hours already. NatWest, S/C: 54-41-51. A/C: 50952540. cubiccentimetre@gmail.com

PLEASE HELP: £15,000 debt incurred through unforeseen circumstances. Barclays, S/C: 20-49-11. A/C: 40871028. Any help appreciated, genuinely desperate.

PLYMOUTH-DAKAR RALLY. Like the Paris-Dakar but in £100 bangers. A 4000-mile, 300-team charity rally. A talented but skint film-maker has a place, car and team. Needs equipment that will be sold with cars for charity at finish. What a story! Thanks. Stuart: 07970 689 878.

DESPERATE. Business in rent problems, mortgage in arrears. Need 7K, will do payback. No interest. Allied Irish, S/C: 23-84-81. A/C: 02166-035.

TRUSTED MY FRIEND with my money. Now? No friend, no money, no trust. Please will you help. IBAN ES, S/C: 96-20-90. A/C: 0235490084137086.

MASTERS DEGREE – FUNDING REJECTED. £3K needed by lady (39) to fulfil life-long dream. Please help. Ulster Bank, S/C: 98-12-90. A/C: 80557341.

PLEASE HELP: NEED £50,000. Nationwide, S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 74481500.

GOLDEN RETRIEVER, 10 months, needs pioneering life saving operation at Royal Veterinary College Hospital. £6,500 bill. Help gratefully accepted. NatWest, S/C: 60-08-04. A/C: 56524307. fm.mcculloch4@ntlworld.com

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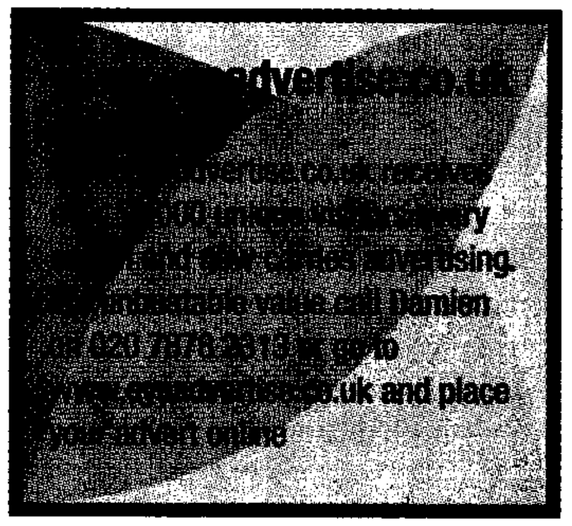

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